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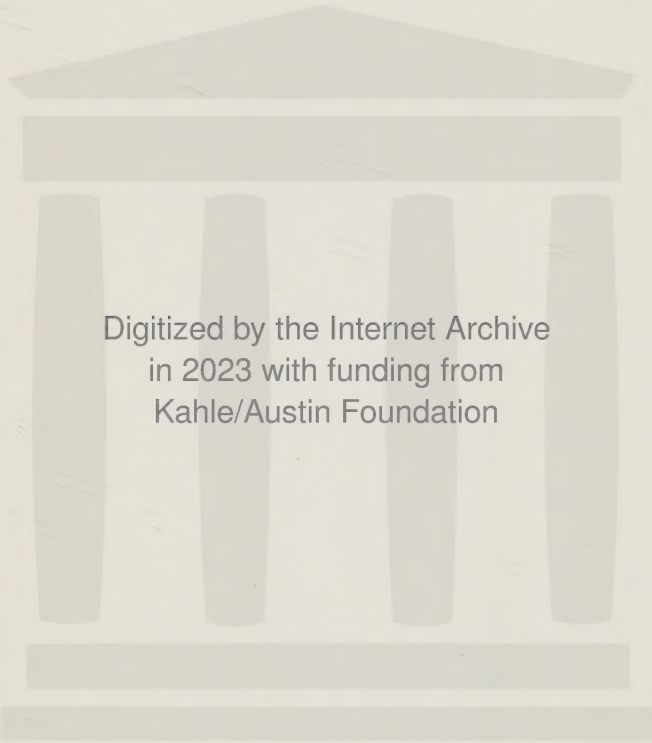
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PHYLLIS—AND A PHILOSOPHER
LECTURES TO LIVING AUTHORS

LECTURES
ON
DEAD AUTHORS
and other Essays

By E. H. LACON WATSON

Author of "Lectures to Living Authors"

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LECTURES ON DEAD AUTHORS

I

REVIEWING—ANCIENT AND MODERN

THE late Lord Beaconsfield, writing no doubt in a moment of justifiable irritation, once propounded the thesis that critics were those who had failed in Literature or Art. Other writers of equal or greater eminence have at various times produced equally unpleasant phrases, estimating the value of a harmless and perhaps a necessary race. In fact, a century or more ago there was a real state of warfare between author and reviewer: in the eyes of the one the other was a mere assassin, a paid bravo, a bilious fellow who delighted in destroying delicate flowers that were too fine for his gross comprehension. The exploits of men like Gifford and Jeffrey, the violent assaults made upon poets like Keats and Shelley, explain this partial view. I have thought sometimes that it might be not unamusing to publish a selection from the first reviews of works since celebrated, such as Gifford's assault on *Endymion*; and it might also prove a useful tonic to reviewers of the present day, who seem altogether to have lost the art of sustained invective.

We are, in fact, absurdly polite to our victims to-day. I wonder sometimes whither the old slashing school of reviewers have fled. I

have met none of the breed for many years—or at least none worthy of comparison with the giants of old time. Thirty years ago the *Saturday Review* had a reputation for scarifying a novelist neatly; and the old *Pall Mall Gazette* of that epoch would occasionally handle an author without troubling to put on the gloves. Now we rarely find even a single hebdomadal sacrifice in our weekly paper, and the dailies prophesy smooth things even of the foolishhest books. There are no scalp-hunters of the old type to be found on the war-path to-day.

I suppose the old-fashioned brutality was deplorable, but it had its advantages. A reaction was inevitable, in an age which possessed a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and spoke harshly of “blood sports” and vivisection. Living authors must also be protected from the inhumanity of their own species. Then, had not Matthew Arnold defined criticism as “a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world?” Not a word, you observe, of the necessity for chastisement! Yet it is surely essential that your reviewer should have also a touch of the pedagogue about him. I do not say he should be perpetually flourishing the lash, but he should be capable of using it on occasion. The ignorant and the presumptuous should not be encouraged over much. It is not for the good of literature that some writers should be allowed to flourish unchecked. The garden of letters requires a few capable men armed with shears and pruning-knife, no less than the fair maiden with a watering-pot.

Our present mildness is, I take it, chiefly due to this reaction from a too violent method. I am not of those who put it down to a fear of losing the publishers' advertisements. Here and there it is conceivable that there may have been a craven editor who impressed upon his critics the need of mildness for this reason, but there could not have been many. Besides, I do not think that the publishers ever cared much what sort of rod was laid upon their authors' backs. From their point of view it was infinitely better for a book to be pilloried than neglected: it was sometimes better for its sale that a certain diversity of opinion should be entertained about its merits than that it should be overwhelmed in a monotonous unanimity of praise. The authors, I daresay, thought differently. It is proverbially difficult to sate these gentlemen with cream and sugar. I have known authors refuse to allow copies of their books to be sent to any paper which had once given them what they were pleased to call a "bad" review. Let a paper make one error in this respect and it was placed upon the Index. The late Miss Corelli carried this idea so far that towards the close of her career she interdicted her publishers altogether from supplying her novels to the press for review. If any reviewer wished to deliver himself upon the engaging subject of her last book he had (as was only fair) to contribute his mite towards the author's support by purchasing a copy, or, at the least, by borrowing it from a library.

This, I imagine, was a mistaken policy. No doubt the author needs a little encouragement from time to time, but he (and especially she)

needs also honest criticism. Like a field of corn, the mind of the artist requires not only the warmth of the kindly sun, but also the rigours of winter ice and snow. It must be ploughed and harrowed, scratched and torn and broken up, if it is to produce the best results. And the old-fashioned reviewers, to do them justice, were wont to perform this useful function adequately and with a certain gusto that aroused curiosity in the mind of the reader. (Let a man write with zest, even if it be only a damning review, and he shall interest his readers.) I recollect that after first reading Macaulay's onslaught on Robert Montgomery, I could not be satisfied till I had got hold of that poet's works, to judge for myself whether he had been treated too hardly by the critic. Other young enthusiasts no doubt did the same, when reviewer and reviewed were yet alive. I daresay neither Macaulay in the *Edinburgh* nor John Wilson in *Blackwood's* did the poet much harm, so far as his sales went. I note that *The Omnipresence of the Deity* first appeared in 1828, and was slaughtered by Macaulay in the April of 1830. None the less, by 1858 it had reached its twenty-eighth edition. And, as to the effect produced upon Mr. Montgomery himself by the *Edinburgh* criticism, we have no reason to suppose that it was other than beneficial. At any rate, he continued to bring out further volumes of verse in succeeding years, and it is safe to say that they were no worse than the two upon which the critic conferred an unenviable immortality.

I think the damage done by these old reviewers in periodicals like *Blackwood's*, the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Quarterly* has been

largely over-estimated by timorous or compassionate men of letters. Of course we no longer believe the legend, fostered by Byron and Shelley, that Keats had been "snuffed out" by an article in the *Quarterly Review*. If you read the attack in question you will probably be astonished at its mildness. It would have been a very tender literary weakling who would have faded away on reading that, and Keats was not a weakling—in spirit.

Swinburne himself admitted that it would have taken an exceptionally acute judge to discern much merit in the first book of the *Poems*, or in the "weedy wilderness" of *Endymion*. I daresay Keats was annoyed at the review, but assuredly he was also stimulated. And this is one of the critic's functions. His it is to goad the artist on to higher endeavour—to secure that he shall not be satisfied with what he has already done. The true artist, of course, is never satisfied: the best he has done is, after all, but an approximation to the ideal that was in his mind; but sometimes he may be betrayed into a smug self-satisfaction, whereby his value as artist is at once diminished. The critic stands by, guarding this exit from the narrow way into the flowery fields of slovenly and complacent performance. It is thanks to him if here and there a real artist has been saved (sometimes, it may be, not too politely) from his more indolent self.

The critic, that is to say, should stand on guard; but, unhappily, he seems to have abandoned his post. Not only in the world of letters, but in painting, music, the theatre we find the same. This is an age of superlatives,

and when the critic of to-day praises he does so with no uncertain voice. Modern journalism delights in the discovery of some new genius once a week—not entirely through native kindness of heart, but because at all costs the reader must be kept interested. We like to feel that we are living in stirring times : that every morning a new great artist is liable to be discovered ; and it is the business of every good journalist to give the public what the public wants. If the supply of real merit is unequal to the demand it is mercifully always possible to discover eccentricity or plausible imitation. I recollect, in the last decade of the nineteenth century, when one tiny shop in Vigo Street still sheltered the undivided firm of Elkin Mathews and John Lane, how one of our morning papers used to make a practice of hailing a new poet once a fortnight or so. Several young men awoke in those days to find themselves famous—sometimes for nearly a week. One or two of them might have attained to something, but for the chorus of injudicious praise. How the reviewers grovelled in ecstatic admiration before Mr. Stephen Phillips, poet and playwright ! I remember one enthusiastic gentleman claiming for him the stage-craft of Sardou, combined with the voice of Milton : he was a new Shakespeare, the rising hope of the British stage. Probably Mr. Phillips would have done better work if his critics had tempered their panegyric with a dash of bitter.

One of the worst features of modern reviewing is the fact that readers now find it all but impossible to obtain good guidance. Amid this shower of indiscriminate praise, how are they to discover the few works that are really worthy

of their attention? Long ago the serious student found that it was no use trusting to the press, that the critics' valuation of contemporary literature was rarely even intended to be a serious estimate; and now he pays less and less heed to the most impassioned pæans. And this means that even the most flaming review has lost a great deal of its former value. Thirty years ago a good review in an important paper would sell an edition of a new book: now the publisher considers himself fortunate if it secures a repeat order of another hundred copies from the libraries. The public, so often deceived, has decided to rely upon its unaided judgment. And the result is, that it becomes more and more difficult for good work to force its way to the front. Beneath the mountains of rubbish that are shot forth upon the book-stalls day by day, how is the reader to disinter the few gems when his appointed guides confuse him by hysterical praise of every bit of broken glass.

I suppose this is especially the case with poetry and with fiction. In some branches of literature, such as history, philosophy and science, your editor will still take the trouble to look round among his staff for a gentleman who may be supposed to know something of the subject; but with fiction or poetry the first casual hand that offers is commonly considered good enough for the purpose. Charles Brookfield, in his book of reminiscences, relates how he chose the stage for a profession because it was the only trade that a man was paid to learn. The reviewing of fiction is another—though it is true that the amount of pay received is not usually high. There are,

of course, distinctions to be drawn. An important novel by a well-known hand will be allotted a column or so in some papers, signed perhaps by a name equally well known in some other field, who is adequately paid for his trouble. But it is still the main desire of most editors to say, if possible, a few words about almost everything; and the result is that the young apprentice is often handed a bundle of a dozen novels or so and bidden to say a few harmless words about each in the space of half a column. Can he be expected to read carefully through the whole dozen for a paltry guinea? Not unless he is very young and more than commonly enthusiastic. He glances hastily at the first pages, dives into the middle, skims through the last chapter; and in due course we read that *World Without End* will undoubtedly consolidate the reputation that Mr. Dash so deservedly won with *As it Was in the Beginning*.

These short notices might, I think, be abolished. It is degrading to see, in a weekly paper, a string of minor poets festooned in a single column like a garland of larks in a poulterer's shop. And yet it is difficult to suggest other treatment. On the next page, probably, you shall find nine or ten novelists treated in the same fashion. Each man gets a kindly word or two, a quotable extract for the publisher's list. Does it do them any good? Perhaps it would if readers could depend upon the appreciation being honestly done. I think all reviews should be signed. Authors should have so much protection against the stiletto of the hired assassin: critics should have what meed of fame they deserve for a sound and

workmanlike piece of criticism. Let our reviewer come out into the open and he may say what he will. Only, for the sake of his craft, let him say what he really thinks, honestly and after due examination of the work offered for criticism.

II

SAMUEL BUTLER AND HIS BIOGRAPHER

IT is not necessary now for the writer to assume an apologetic or an instructive attitude when writing of Samuel Butler. Some few years ago, say just towards the end of the last century, we had to be careful to avoid misconception when speaking of the author of *Life and Habit* or *The Way of All Flesh*. There were several other Samuels in the field, with prior claims to consideration; and when we had safely disentangled the latest of the name from the author of *Hudibras* and from that other Samuel Butler, his grandfather, headmaster of Shrewsbury School and subsequently Bishop of Lichfield, it was more than probable that he would be dismissed (if recognised at all) as a "one-book" man. *Erewhon* Butler, men used to call him in those days, and his first important book seemed likely to hang about his neck to the last, more of a clog than an incentive to further effort. And it was by no means everyone who had even heard of *Erewhon*: still fewer who had read it. The Butler cult was slow in beginning. Even in June 1902, when he died, it gave the hearer a pleasant shock of surprise to hear his name mentioned in general company: Butlerians were so few and far between. To display any acquaintance with his works was to invite a

sort of intimacy with other admirers. In the same way, some twenty years before, strangers meeting at a railway station might thaw into sudden friendship at the sight of a bag of golf clubs. Now, everybody plays golf, just as everybody knows something about Samuel Butler, and it is improbable that the charm would work any longer in either case.

Even the critics, whose pleasant task it should be to direct attention to the worthy in art and letters, were not much better informed. There were one or two, when he died, who wrote about him with intelligence and appreciation: certainly not more, outside his own circle of personal friends. When Mr. Streatfield, Butler's literary executor, contributed an article on his work to the *Monthly Review* some three months after his death, a writer in a well-known literary weekly took occasion to comment on the greatly exaggerated importance he appeared to attach to Butler's writings, and to doubt whether his name or any of his works would be remembered in ten years' time. It was true that Mr. Bernard Shaw had spoken warmly of him, but no one, even then, took a Shaw pronouncement too seriously. Here was, we were told, one of those men who had frittered away tolerable talents in the pursuit of too many and too diverse objects. He had written on Homer and the Shakespeare sonnets, on the painting and sculpture of Holbein and Tabacchetti, on religion and on biology, besides carrying on a feud with Darwin and the majority of our science leaders of the day. His books were no doubt clever, but of merely ephemeral interest. No one man could touch so many points of life successfully, with real knowledge.

There were rumours, too, that he dabbled in oils: had even exhibited at the Academy; and that his name had been seen on the published score of an oratorio, a cantata, possibly both. It was enough to worry any reviewer.

Reviewers had seldom been happy with Butler. He did not go out of his way to soothe their agitated souls: on the other hand, he seemed rather (during his life-time) to find a mischievous pleasure in irritating and mystifying them. Like Socrates of old, he employed the ironic method, and irony is never a popular weapon. Critics are apt to consider it unfair: it is so hard to tell whether your author is writing seriously or in jest; and for a reviewer to deal seriously with the ironical (as some did in the case of *The Fair Haven*) is to damage his reputation almost irretrievably in the eyes of his editor. Far better to go to the other extreme, and assume that here is an author who is never in earnest. Most of them learned by degrees to adopt this later and safer course, which is perhaps the reason why the author of *Luck or Cunning?* was so long regarded in many quarters as nothing more than an accomplished and versatile trifler.

Samuel Butler was born on the 4th of December 1835, at Langar Rectory, Nottingham, where his father, the Rev. Thomas Butler, was incumbent. His grandfather was still at that time head-master of Shrewsbury, as well as rector of Kenilworth, prebendary of Lichfield, and archdeacon of Derby. Those were the days of pluralities, but these clerical preferments were not suffered to interfere with the future bishop's efficiency as a schoolmaster. Like so many of his name, he had proved him-

self a brilliant classical scholar, carrying off the Craven scholarship in 1793 against two famous competitors in John Keate, afterwards head-master of Eton, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Under Butler's rule the reputation of Shrewsbury increased greatly, and when Kennedy succeeded him in 1836 the standard of classical scholarship there was probably higher than at any other school in England. Kennedy continued the tradition. He made a first-class classic (bracketed twelfth in the tripos of 1858) of our Samuel Butler, who went to the family school at the age of thirteen, and proceeded in due course to the family college of St. John's, Cambridge. His reward for this arduous piece of work was to be caricatured as Dr. Skinner in *The Way of All Flesh*—a novel which, in conjunction with Mr. Festing Jones's two massive volumes, throws a good deal of light upon Butler's early history and the relations between him and his family.

Like Ernest Pontifex in that story, Butler was destined for the Church: like him also, after taking his degree he went to London and began to prepare for ordination, living among the poor and doing a certain amount of parochial work. The harmony of the gospels, I believe, was the rock upon which the hero of his novel suffered shipwreck. Butler himself seems to have been troubled by doubts as to the efficacy of infant baptism. But in any case it is clear that ordination would never have suited either the Butler of fiction or the Butler of real life. The essence of the man instinctively turned against taking anything for granted, against a blind obedience to authority. Naturally, there was something of a family quarrel on the

subject, and an infinity of discussion as to a substitute for Holy Orders by which a living might be made. It ended, curiously enough, in the purchase of a sheep-run in the Upper Rangitata district of Canterbury Province, New Zealand. It is improbable that Butler was anything of a genius as a sheep farmer, but the colony was on the up grade at the time and it was difficult to go altogether wrong. He sold out after five years for eight thousand pounds—a sum that he considered amply sufficient for his simple needs, and came home. For the remainder of his life he occupied 15 Clifford's Inn, dividing his time between painting, literature and music. He brought back with him from New Zealand material for his first important book, and also an invalid friend, who was destined to draw rather heavily on his reserves, both of friendship and finance, before he died thirty-three years later. But the history of the remarkably one-sided attachment of Butler to Charles Paine Pauli is dealt with at length in Mr. Jones's volumes.

Erewhon, or Over the Range: a Work of Satire and Imagination was the work for which his memories of the Rangitata district supplied the setting. It came out in 1872; and, like all Butler's books, had some difficulty in finding a publisher. Among others who refused it were Messrs. Chapman and Hall, for whom at that time George Meredith was reader. The best judges are not infallible when it comes to predicting the commercial success of a book, and Meredith is no more to be blamed for this lapse than James Payn for his refusal to recommend *John Inglesant*. Yet of all Utopian literature since *Gulliver's Travels* this was cer-

tainly the best. Butler had some of the qualities of Swift : he also had the logical mind and a serious gravity in discussing the absurdest propositions, giving an air of plausibility and even of inevitability to the most fantastic conclusions. *Erewhon* succeeded : it remained, until Butler's death, the only one of his works that produced a balance on the right side—and this in spite of the fact that he had to find the money for publication. It also gave him a reputation, of a sort with which he could perhaps have dispensed. These early works of satire and imagination are apt to hang heavy round the neck of authors anxious in later life to be taken seriously.

Butler's comment on Meredith's rejection of *Erewhon* was characteristic. He wrote in 1899 :

This is not strange, for I should probably have condemned his *Diana of the Crossways*, or indeed any other of his books, had it been submitted to myself. No wonder if his work repels me, that mine should repel him.

But Meredith was by no means the only modern writer of eminence who repelled him. At the instigation of his friend, Miss Savage, he was induced to read *Middlemarch*—a work which she considered might give him some help as to the most successful method of composing a novel. The book seemed to him “a long-winded piece of studied brag” and singularly unattractive. He used to like Thackeray and Tennyson : he grew to despise them. Of Rossetti he wrote : “I dislike his face and his manner and his work, and I hate his poetry and his friends.” Carlyle must have been “a wretch to run Goethe as he did,” and he con-

fessed that he was glad when Dean Stanley died. As to the gentlemen who wrote upon scientific subjects, from the great Charles Darwin down to Mr. Grant Allen, he had plenty to say about them, in a vein the reverse of complimentary, in *Life and Habit* and other of his biological studies. You may look through the whole of a singularly careful and candid biography and find scarcely a word in praise of any modern author. The only two instances of laudatory comment discoverable are on Mr. Garnett's *Twilight of the Gods* and on the poems of Mr. Robert Bridges.

It would be unfair to take all Butler's epistolary and other comments as expressions of sober thought. He habitually said rather more than he meant in the way of criticism. Nor would it be quite just to assume that his own lack of success had warped his judgment of men who had attained to lofty positions in the world of letters without, so far as he could see, any better qualifications than he possessed himself. This is an infirmity common enough with small minds, but he was certainly not a small-minded man. What a man likes or dislikes in art or literature, so long as his opinions are honest and his own, should not be a subject for quarrel; and Butler's opinions, though sometimes violently stated, were undoubtedly sincere. But I think he had a natural predisposition against authority. If the bulk of readers praised, there was *prima facie* ground for supposing that something was wrong—good ground at the least for an unbiassed personal investigation. What could one think of the intellect of a public that had bought less than three hundred copies of *Unconscious Memory*,

and less than two hundred of *The Authoress of the Odyssey*? There are some who think that, in the matter of literary baggage, anything but the very best is a superfluity. Butler was content to wave on one side all who failed to appeal to him at first sight, inventing any fanciful reason for his dislike. This passage, for example, from the *Note-Books* :

Talking it over, we agreed that Blake was no good because he learnt Italian at over sixty in order to read Dante, and we knew Dante was no good because he was so fond of Virgil, and Virgil was no good because Tennyson ran him, and as for Tennyson—well, Tennyson goes without saying.

So, too, his objection to Charles Lamb, because he had the misfortune to be taken up by Canon Ainger, and to Lord Lawrence, because he was acquainted with his Aunt Sarah, were couched in a spirit of humorous extravagance. They simply meant that he did not consider further study of these personalities would be likely to interest him. He preferred to employ his valuable time on something from which he might expect some return. And for the rest, since people apparently expected some reason for these preferences, let them have the first that came into his head.

He was, in fact, shy of making new acquaintances. He did not make friends easily ; when he did, he gave them all he had—sometimes unwisely, as in the case of Pauli. He concentrated the flow of his affection upon a few objects. Homer, Handel, Shakespeare from the past sufficed him. In the pages of the life by Mr. Festing Jones you may find the names of the few contemporaries for whom he cared.

His biographer was chief among them ; and he was worthy of the honour. The two handsome and massive volumes which he entitled *Samuel Butler, A Memoir* are assuredly a fine monument. Critics have hailed them as one of the few really good biographies of our time.

I do not believe I had read anything of Butler before 1894. By then, I suppose, he had just finished the *Life and Letters* of his grandfather and namesake, and was turning his attention to the fascinating subject of *The Authoress of the Odyssey*. The subject had been suggested by a secular oratorio called *Ulysses*, which he and Jones had composed together, on the Handelian model. Butler was always thorough : having been once drawn to the *Odyssey* he could not rest until he had translated the whole of it for himself, the joint work of Butcher and Lang failing to please a mind that detected affectation almost too readily. Thus it was that he came to the poem, after a lapse of five-and-thirty years, with fresh eyes. Something about the scheme of the story baffled him, and it was not long before he was hot on the track of a new theory. The close study of the original necessary for preparing a prose translation led his ingenious mind to the conclusion that the writer was a young, unmarried woman living in the neighbourhood of Trapani in Sicily, and out he went, as soon as he could find time, to collect evidence on the spot in support of this hypothesis.

He collected a great deal, and marshalled his evidence with all the skill and subtlety at his command. But the world of Homeric scholarship could not be induced to take any notice of his efforts. The remarkable discovery scarcely caused a tremor in the two great University

towns. *The Authoress of the Odyssey* produced at the time less visible effect than Butler's excursions into biology—which is saying a good deal. Yet, regarded as literature, it makes fascinating reading. Butler maintained that the young poetess had portrayed herself in the character of Nausicaa, and he displayed a marvellous ingenuity in picking out little feminine touches of description here and there in the poem that, he maintained, could never have occurred to a mere man. But the few critics (of the customary University type) who noticed the book at all refused to take it seriously: they persisted, much to Butler's annoyance, in regarding his argument as the latest jest of an accomplished, versatile, but irreverent author. It is the common penalty that an English writer has to face for refusing to handle his subjects in the orthodox fashion. Butler must needs employ a manner of his own, even in Homeric criticism. He should never, of course, have called his book by the title he selected. If he wanted it to receive serious attention in scholastic circles he should have put on the title-page, "Reasons for Supposing the Writer of the *Odyssey* to have been a Woman, with Some Further Remarks as to the Sicilian Origin of the Poem," or something of that sort. His title annoyed the critics by taking too much for granted. To make things worse he prefixed also a frontispiece to his book, a picture of a woman reproduced from a painting in the museum at Cortona, supposed to be of Greek workmanship and to represent one of the Muses. Underneath this print he boldly put the name "Nausicaa"—which was going rather far, even for Butler. The fact is, he went out

of his way to antagonise possible opponents from the start. If he could not make converts, one imagines him thinking, he could at least annoy the orthodox.

Nobody likes being neglected, and Butler's disposition, however painfully he might strive to disguise the fact, was peculiarly sensitive. But he had some staunch friends who really believed in him, and made it possible for him to continue his self-appointed task of "heaving half-bricks" into the Olympian circles where sate the high priests of religion, literature and science. Henry Festing Jones, his biographer, was chief among these. He may almost be said to have consecrated his life to what we should now call a system of "Butler propaganda." His method was one peculiarly his own. Jones was never one of those violent partisans who are continually and loudly thumping the pulpit to rouse the attention of the congregation. He worked quietly and unobtrusively, as the Germans worked abroad before the Great War. His policy was one of peaceful penetration. He just assumed that anyone who might be talking with him at the moment was as much interested in Butler and as well acquainted with his works and his family history and the domestic secrets of the rooms in Clifford's Inn as Jones himself. "Alfred" or Miss Savage had made this or that comment: the visitor was supposed to know all about these two and their relations with Butler without further explanation: if he did not know and was puzzled he could enquire, and gain useful knowledge. Jones carried this avuncular manner into his two biographical volumes. I have heard some

complaints of their prolixity, but to my mind no small part of their charm lies in the almost child-like simplicity which takes for granted our interest in every detail of the family history, not only of Butler himself, but of his biographer and even of his clerk and valet.

Butler's one real novel, *The Way of All Flesh*, was published soon after his death by Mr. Streatfield, his literary executor, and has aroused a good deal of controversy. I do not propose to discuss the question whether a novelist is justified in putting his own parents in the pillory, for that Theobald and Christina Pontifex were close portraits of his father and mother the *Memoir* makes sufficiently clear, but the book itself is worth a paragraph. It is as different from the ordinary novel of commerce as can well be imagined, but it would be difficult to imagine Butler writing anything in the accepted manner. If the weight of received authority happened to be in favour of one view, or of one method, that was enough to set him probing for the foundations ; and when he found these insufficient or unsound he hastened to let the world know it.

Butler kept his one novel by him for years. It was begun soon after the completion of *The Fair Haven*, and he worked upon it at intervals for more than ten years, revising and rewriting. The natural consequence is that, judged by modern standards, the book is not well constructed. It suffers from excess of material and perhaps also from the author's changing point of view. In this hurried age, readers demand that a story should have a certain rapidity of movement. The inessential must be cut out, the interest concentrated. Butler never found

it easy to cut out. And besides, here he was aiming at something more than the mere telling of a story. As with the life of his grandfather, he intended his novel to illustrate the social and religious life of England during the better part of the nineteenth century.

I think that Butler had the habit of using his material more than once. I do not say that this was the common laziness of an inefficient author, who wishes to save himself the trouble of writing. Festing Jones has said that it was due to the desire of restating arguments more forcibly in another form; and I daresay this had something to say in the matter. He liked to give the insensitive public a second chance. Thus *Erewhon* arose gradually out of the idea of rewriting two articles that had appeared in the *Christchurch Press*, and a forgotten pamphlet on the Resurrection supplied material both for *The Fair Haven* and for *Erewhon Revisited*. This is very well, but in *The Way of All Flesh* it seems to me that he inserted a good deal of material that has no business in the book at all—as, for example, an essay on the Greek Drama written by Ernest Pontifex when an undergraduate. Whole-hearted admirers will not agree that anything should be excised. It is true that whatever Butler wrote he thought, and whatever he thought was usually worth reading, but sane admirers may be allowed to wish that he had been persuaded to remove matter that was not relevant to the story.

Butler was a “good hater,” and there will always be some to hold that he struck too pitilessly at the many and varied objects of his dislike. Some of his quarrels, perhaps most of them, arose from slight misunderstandings.

Festing Jones himself has done something to clear up the trouble with Charles Darwin. And it would be useless to attempt disguising the fact that he disliked and despised his parents, whom he pilloried in the novel I have been discussing. Mr. Heatherley, master of the art school in which he worked for many years, said of that book that the author had taken all the tenderest feelings of our nature, spread them carefully on the floor, stamped on them till he had reduced them to an indistinguishable mass of filth, and then handed them round for inspection. Apologists may say what they will, but probably there will always be some to agree with this forcible criticism. And as to the value of his many theories—on evolution, the *Sonnets* of Shakespeare, the *Odyssey*, I do not know that it much matters whether they will stand the test of time or not. Samuel Butler's value as a writer remains. His was essentially a stimulating mind. The man was free from all suspicion of cant: he subscribed to none of the popular formulas: he had a healthy detestation of the common tricks of the trade practised by literary gentlemen. His mind was alert and original, and he could do without any false parade of dignity. His wealth of illustration was drawn from a variety of sources, from painting, and music, and personal reminiscence; and he did not deliver his opinions in measured cadence as though from a lofty pulpit, but chatted easily, as to one on his own level. If he did something to destroy the pontifical attitude of our teachers in science, scholarship and theology he may be held to have deserved the handsome shrine which Festing Jones has raised to his memory.

III

LITERARY AUNT SALLIES

(*With a Note on Marie Corelli*)

THIRTY or forty years ago, wherever two or three of us (the fraternity of writers) were gathered together, talking as is our pleasant custom about our fellows, it was pretty certain that any mention of Miss Corelli's name would still, as by a charm, the tumult of discord that inevitably had arisen. About the works of Marie we were all agreed. They were, in fact, almost too good to be true. Nobody came anywhere near her—unless perhaps it was Hall Caine, not yet promoted to the dignity of knighthood. (Indeed, the Order of the British Empire had not then been born.) The monarch of Greeba Castle had a good deal in common with the lady of Stratford-on-Avon. There was also a sort of healthy rivalry between the two in those spacious days towards the close of the Victorian era. They spurred each other on to greater efforts. One wrote *The Christian*, the other smartly retorted with *The Master Christian*. *The Eternal City* came from the pen of Caine; *Temporal Power* from that of Corelli. There was added to the intrinsic value of these important works something of the interest that always attaches to a race, a competition.

The sporting British public loves a race, and

this rivalry between two popular novelists no doubt stimulated the sales of both. The number of copies printed in a first edition, the number of editions, and the time before they were exhausted—all these trifling details were eagerly noted by the young gentlemen who used to contribute literary paragraphs to the press. Sometimes one of the august pair would descend for a space into the arena, explaining to an eager world the secrets of success or lamenting the little troubles that attended an almost excessive popularity. It may be admitted that Miss Corelli was easily the victor here. There was one delightful contribution of hers to the *Strand Magazine*, then comparatively young. It was entitled *The Life Literary*, and I remember that great stress was laid in it on the annoyance caused by these perpetual offers of marriage—some two or three arriving, it appeared, by every post. And the critic came in for some nasty knocks, too. Miss Corelli never really loved reviewers. When she introduced one into a novel (and she generally took care to do so), his rôle was commonly that of a minor villain—a reviewer was not important enough for a big part—who performed little acts of meanness in his capacity as jackal to the Wicked Peer. Yet he was allowed sometimes to repent—to succumb to the glorious blue eyes of the heroine (curiously enough, Miss Corelli's heroines were generally novelists), to be forgiven his manifold sins.

Corelli loved to banter these dull dogs. Caine, on the other hand, was but a solemn fellow himself. He lacked the other's feminine lightness of touch. He produced an article or two, no doubt, about his works, but never anything

comparable with that famous article in the *Strand*. The bittern of Greeba Castle emitted a hollower, a more serious boom. His touch was heavier. It might be said that his instrument was the resounding bass drum; Corelli's the ear-piercing fife. I have heard it said by a determined phrase-maker that the author of *Barabbas* wrote always at the top of her voice.

Does anyone read *Barabbas* now? Does anyone study the works of Sir Thomas Hall Caine? I suppose so—and let me admit at once, with what grace I may, that they might read worse novels than his. But I take it that this pair of Victorian “best sellers,” who stood forth conspicuous among the lesser stars as butts for the young writer to aim at with his shafts of ridicule, excite but a tepid interest in the literary circles of to-day. Then Victoria still reigned, and the Great Queen set her subjects an example: the fact that she admired the works of Corelli crept somehow into the press. The country rectory, the Brighton boarding house, the tradesman's villa, all hastened to follow where Majesty had led. The earnest student sometimes followed as well, anxious to discover the secret of those mammoth sales. The mystery, however, bade fair to remain inexplicable.

The present generation, I take it, is not profoundly interested in these researches. When a new comet swims into our ken we take it for what it is worth: we know it for a comet and no planet, and do not institute too curious enquiries about its mass and volume, its weight and speed. But there are still novelists whose works sell in large numbers to the manifest astonishment of critics. An examination into

the causes of success, though it be a past success, may still have an archæological interest, a bearing on the study of letters. And accordingly I have been looking through one or two of these old books lately in an endeavour to recover something like my old point of view.

In effect, I have come to the conclusion that certain disabilities were necessary then in order to become a thoroughly successful novelist. They may be equally necessary now, but I confess that I have not studied our modern Ethel Dells and Gilbert Frankaus. One cannot do everything, and the wise man keeps as far as possible to his own generation. But it always seemed to me that the quality which assisted both Caine and Corelli to the heights they adorned so worthily for so many years was a certain lack of humorous perception. They could never see how funny they were. That was at once the secret of their success with the many and of their failure with the few.

A keen sense of humour, I admit, is by no means an unmixed blessing. It is essentially a gift for which the mediocre should pray. It may easily prove a mere impediment to the great. On this account I maintain that both these writers did well to exclude it from their armoury. Without that restraining influence they managed to accomplish effects that others would never have dreamed of trying. They were permitted thus to attain to melodramatic heights that had been swept bare of rivals by the healthy breeze of laughter. And, of course, the critics scoffed; but what of that? Sometimes they pretended that such writers could not be serious; that they must be trying to

see how much a world of fools would stand. In their hearts they knew better. The great secret of the immense hold that Miss Corelli had on her public was that she always gave the impression of being very much in earnest. And no doubt she was—about some things. She had strong prejudices and strong sympathies, and she let the public see, quite plainly, which were which. Characters she disliked were trounced with a right good will, while she was as violently in love with her heroines as the most love-sick boy could have been. About these characters there were never any half shades: they were always one thing or the other: they had to be hated or loved. And in those days the general reader (still a simple soul) liked an author who knew her own mind. The more clearly the characters were labelled the less necessity there was for serious mental exertion.

Assuming it to be the case that no writer can become a "best seller" without a certain sincerity, it is clear that this lack of keenness in humorous perception must be valuable to a melodramatic novelist in more ways than one. It permits her not only to develop plots of a sufficient complication, but to stick at nothing in order to glorify her sympathetic, and vilify her unsympathetic, characters. There may have been some lack of finesse about Miss Corelli's methods, but there was never the slightest doubt as to her intentions. When she disliked anyone—whether it was a member of the "Smart Set," or a fat clergyman, or a knighted soap-boiler, or a literary critic—she took good care to let everyone know it. She put them in the most unpleasant situations,

quite regardless of probability : she drew attention to their physical defects, of which she had taken care to give them an adequate supply. It was much if she permitted them to shuffle out of the story towards the end without undergoing personal chastisement. In short, it was made abundantly clear to the most careless reader that the scoundrels were to be harried with the utmost severity from start to finish.

On the other hand, what glorious figures were those heroines ! It is true bilious critics sometimes complained that they all bore a curious family likeness to their creator, that they were not infrequently novelists themselves, that even their initials were sometimes the same as those of Marie Corelli. But what of it ? What if they were ? The main thing was that she believed in them herself, that they voiced her own opinions, that their scorn was her scorn. And with what a lambent flame did they not scorch the clumsy miscreants who opposed them ! How the heroine used to lash the *nouveau riche*, the too daring woman who smoked, the idle "Smart Set" who hankered after Bridge on Sunday, and (once again) the literary critic ! That was what the reader of the lower middle class used to love in the later days of Victoria the Good. Here was a writer who knew her own mind, who did not beat about the bush, who dealt in no inuendoes. "She gave it to them Society women proper," was the common verdict.

This, then, was where a slight failure in the sense of humour may have advantaged the writer. It was a different matter, of course, when it become necessary to pose as a light comedian, a gay and sprightly fairy. It must

be admitted that some of Miss Corelli's supposedly comic characters rank among the most remarkable monstrosities in the world of fiction. I took the trouble, some years ago, to copy out some pages of dialogue ; but I do not think it necessary now to labour the point. Probably her greatest admirers never seriously regarded Miss Corelli as an amusing writer.

I am inclined to think that a burning hatred of reviewers was the animating principle of much of Miss Corelli's work. It is clear that she visualised the literary critic as a sort of Matthew Arnold raised to the *n*th power—so far as the less pleasing features of his character and appearance would go. The unfortunate fellow was generally pictured with pale, thin, compressed lips, side-whiskers ("pussy" whiskers was the favourite expression) and furtive, deceitful eyes. He had, of course, the Oxford manner in its worst form. Many a time had this poor devil to go through his paces, dancing to Miss Corelli's tune. He had to quail before the blue eyes of innumerable heroines, shrivelling him with their quiet scorn. How soothing it must have been to arrange these meetings, to give the critics trouncing for trouncing ! But sometimes they were permitted to become tamed, fawning on the foot that kicked them idly away. I cannot help admiring the simplicity, the completeness of that revenge.

I doubt whether Caine would have thought of that. But Sir Thomas never had quite the same bitterness against these poor hacks of literature. I expect, too, he had more restraint. He could be ridiculous enough on occasion, but he rarely let himself go with the same freedom as the lady. He kept the tail of his

eye, warily, on the reviewer as he wrote. I daresay he might even have called in a friend to advise on a doubtful point. And for that reason, I suppose, he was never so popular a target, so heavily battered by the critics' missiles. He did not give reviewers so many openings. It must be admitted that Miss Corelli sometimes invited attack—or else her critics displayed some power of invention. They were captious fellows. Hit high, hit low, there was no pleasing them. They objected to *The Sorrows of Satan* equally with *Barabbas*. They had the impertinence to laugh at Judas Iscariot and his sister, Judith Iscariot: they discovered somewhere, or invented, a herd of magnificent bull heifers. In short, they “ragged” whenever they got a chance. Stratford-on-Avon and Greeba Castle were invited, now and again, to set up their wooden figures for another bombardment. And now, I suppose, they have done their work: the buffeting is over; and we can find it in our hearts to say for them that, with all their faults, they were generally on the side of the angels. Which is more, I fancy, than can be said for most of their modern successors.

IV

THE AUTHOR OF "SANDFORD AND MERTON"

I ADMIT that I felt, as a boy, a strong desire to become better acquainted with Mr. Thomas Day, the admired author of *Sandford and Merton*. He seemed to my youthful and inexperienced eye the Prince of Prigs, the most solemn and fatuous of all that remarkable band of elders, fated from the start to become the butts of their enterprising and ingenious juniors. I should have liked to meet him, to savour his solemn foolishness, to prepare booby traps into which he should walk, still gloriously sublime. But did they really breed gentlemen of that type in England during the second half of the eighteenth century, or was it merely an imaginary picture? We knew his literary masterpiece: the anecdote books told us, in addition, tales of his adventures in search of a wife. I daresay it was then that I determined, in my subconscious self, to look into this little matter of Thomas Day, Esq., when I grew to man's estate. And the result is here.

It is difficult for a later age to estimate the effect produced at the time of their appearance by the most esteemed works of a century and more ago. When this *History of Sandford and Merton* issued from the press, in 1783, it seems to have been regarded as something more than a mere child's book, instinct with a determined

didacticism that must have been remarkable even in those days. There were those who regarded it as a serious treatise on ethics, setting forth ideas that were novel if not revolutionary. If anybody could contrive to read it now, he would discover nothing more noteworthy in its doctrine than an attempt to prove that idleness and wealth are not the sole qualifications for a gentleman, together with the daring but doubtful theory that honest worth and fine clothes are never seen in company. The chief feature of the book that struck me as a small boy was the unremitting completeness with which retribution was meted out to the offender. Young Tommy Merton never wanders from the narrow path without instant and exemplary chastisement. His fine clothes are daubed with mud, or he is ducked in a horse-pond, or attacked by an infuriated bull. And the heroes of the moral tales, scattered with a lavish hand among the adventures of Harry and Tommy, are punished or rewarded with such careful precision that even the serious child of the Anti-Slavery epoch must often have said to himself, “ This is too much.”

Punishment so immediate, reward so obviously fitting, are early discovered by the least observant of us to belong to the realm of fancy rather than fact. I imagine that *Sandford and Merton* was never, strictly speaking, a popular children’s book : it was, very possibly, a popular book for parents to read aloud to their children. But, in any case, the book achieved and long enjoyed a remarkable success. It was translated into French and German. Even now there are probably few families of any persistence of tenure in the

country that could not find a copy lying neglected on some dusty shelf. Fifty years ago it was, with the *Parents' Assistant*, the *Swiss Family Robinson*, and one or two other volumes, part of the stock-in-trade of every well-organised nursery.

I doubt if it is paying Thomas Day too high a compliment when I say that he was more interesting in himself than the most widely circulated of his works. There must have been qualities in the man which the lapse of time has obscured, for the critics of his own age did not regard him exclusively from the standpoint of comedy. They worked off a few mild jests, no doubt, on his experiments in search of matrimonial happiness, but otherwise they seem to have regarded him as a notable man of letters, imbued with certain Quixotic notions, who, if eccentric in some of his ideas, was at least able to pay handsomely for his eccentricities. And, in fact, he was a poet (as they rated poets in those days), an abolitionist in advance of his age, an advocate of American Independence. In collaboration with a friend (who assisted him also in the chief of his matrimonial projects) he wrote *The Dying Negro: A Poem*, which was published in 1773. With his unassisted pen he produced *The Devoted Legions* and *The Desolation of America* — poems which display their intention sufficiently in their titles. He was still young when these works were written, but he had learned already to take himself very seriously.

There is extant a thin octavo volume, entitled *An Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Day, Esqre.*, adorned with a quotation from one of Seneca's tragedies, and dedicated to Mrs.

Day by James Keir. This book, which is a panegyric rather than a life, and was probably published with a view to consoling the afflicted widow, contains many excellent moral reflections, and a certain amount of information concerning our author's early days, though it maintains a discreet silence on the subject of those unfortunate experiments which the anecdote books are never tired of repeating. From this booklet we learn that the future poet was born in 1748, in London ; that his father was employed in the Customs Office, and that his mother (Mr. Day's second wife) was a Miss Bonham. Like most men who have later attained to greatness, Thomas Day appears to have acknowledged gratefully his indebtedness to the sound sense and fortitude of his mother. She “ accustomed him early to bodily exercise, on which he afterwards set so high a value.” Mr. Keir is at the pains also to disinter a trifling anecdote, in which we may trace the germ of several pleasing tales common to many novels of the early nineteenth century, when the rescue of the heroine from a bull was an almost necessary preliminary to wedding bells. The present specimen is, perhaps, redeemed from insignificance by the measured diction of the narrator. I give the essential part of it :—

When she was yet a young unmarried woman, while she was walking in company with another young lady through a field, a bull came running up to them with all the marks of malevolence. Her friend began to run towards the stile, but was prevented by Miss Bonham (the maiden name of Mr. Day's mother), who told her, that as she could reach the stile soon enough to save herself, and as it is the nature of these animals to attack persons in

flight, her life would be in great danger if she attempted to run, and would be inevitably lost if she chanced to fall; but that, if she would steal gently to the stile, she herself would take off the bull's attention from her, by standing between them. Accordingly, turning her face towards the animal with the firmest aspect she could assume, she fixed her eyes steadily upon him. It is said by travellers, that a lion itself may be controlled by the steady look of a human being, but that no sooner a man turns his back than the beast springs upon him as his prey. Miss Bonham, to whom this property of animals seems to have been known . . .

In short, as the property is not unknown to most of us, by hearsay, and as Mr. Keir is incorrigibly long-winded, the remainder of the story may well be left untold. It is sufficient to say that both ladies escaped unharmed, and that Miss Bonham's fortitude was only equalled by her coolness in entering upon so lengthy an explanation when the bull was already running up to her with all the marks of malevolence. I suspect Mr. Day had this story in his mind when he introduced into his immortal work the episode of young Tommy Merton and his aristocratic friends assisting at the bull-baiting.

Whatever traits of character the budding philanthropist inherited from the heroine of this story, it is certain that his education lay entirely in her hands. For the Customs Officer died when his son was but thirteen months old, leaving him a fortune of some £1200 a year—no small sum in those days. The widow (she had by then married another officer in the Customs named Phillips) sent him to a preparatory school and thence to the Charterhouse,

where he came under the care of Dr. Crusius—of some celebrity as a pedagogue in his day. Corpus College, Oxford, then received him, as a gentleman commoner, for his three years, but he left the university without taking his degree. “ At an early period of his life,” says another biographer, “ he manifested a peculiar fondness for scrutinising the human character,” and these studies commonly go unrewarded by academic honours. In 1766 he journeyed, with staff and knapsack, from Oxford to Wales, presumably with the object of enlarging the field of his labours. He was already fired with a love for the unsophisticated : he wished to scrutinise where the “ people were still treading the unimproved paths of nature.”

For that epoch, Thomas Day was distinctly a traveller. He spent a good many of his early years abroad. When experimenting upon the feminine character he spent one winter in Paris, another at Avignon, and a third at Lyons ; one summer in the Austrian Netherlands and another in Holland. He met and conversed with Rousseau : his contemporaries were convinced that this acquaintance had far-reaching effects, though he had, as a matter of fact, read and discussed the works of Jean Jacques with his friends at college. Mr. Keir is eloquent upon the consistency of his hero’s life, the courage of his opinions. “ He was not diverted from his uniform conduct,” we read, “ by the dread of ridicule, so powerful over young minds, by the impulse of passions, by the false glare of ambition, by the allurements of pleasure, nor by the assimilating manners of the age.” In fine, he was one of those rare men who have little sense of humour themselves

and, consequently, little fear of appearing ridiculous in the eyes of others.

Day's choice of a profession was attended with some little difficulty, trifling, however, in comparison with the obstacles that he encountered later on in the more important business of choosing a wife. On philanthropic grounds he had thought of medicine. A certain Dr. Small, of Birmingham, was at this time intimate with him—an able physician, by all accounts, and a man of considerable intellectual power, but something tinged with pessimism. It was his function, on several occasions, to cool the enthusiasm of his too generous friend; and here he represented to him, in well-chosen words, that, in the present condition of medical knowledge, a physician, even with the best intentions in the world, might easily do more harm than good; might, instead of conferring a benefit, bring about a disaster. The candid Small, in short, intimated that it might be many years before medicine became anything like an exact science, and his young friend decided at length to embark on the safer waters of the law, and entered his name at the Middle Temple. The Bar, after all, was the inevitable refuge for a man of means, with a philosophic turn of mind, and a taste for poetry and political pamphleteering.

“Marriage,” says the inimitable Keir, “could not well fail of entering into a plan of life, formed on the principles of virtue.” In fact, it seems to have occupied Day's thoughts from a very early period. That journey of his to Wales (undertaken ostensibly for the purpose of scrutinising the character of the natives) had not improbably the additional motive of a

desire to note the unsophisticated charms of the Welsh ladies. He had prolonged his tour to Ireland, where he made the acquaintance of the celebrated Mr. Edgeworth, and, it is stated, proposed to his sister. Before journeying to the Continent, he had gone to Lichfield, attracted by the fame of the literary coterie then flourishing in that city, the home of Dr. Darwin and of Miss Seward—to whom, by the way, we are indebted for several stories of Day's eccentric habits. Even then he had the merit of knowing what he wanted in order to ensure connubial happiness. His future wife was to be one “ who should have a taste for literature and science, moral and patriotic philosophy, fond of retirement, simple as a mountain girl in dress, diet, and manners, fearless and intrepid as a Spartan wife or Roman heroine.” In poetical form, he enumerated the virtues he required as follows—the quotation is from a poem he wrote while prosecuting his search in a town on the English coast :—

Health's rosy bloom upon thy cheek,
Eyes that with artless lustre roll,
More eloquent than words to speak
The genuine feelings of the soul.

Such be thy form ! thy noble mind
By no false culture led astray ;
By native sense alone refin'd
In Reason's plain and simple way.

As Day's own person was somewhat unkempt and curious in appearance—he had an objection to the use of the comb, founded no doubt on philosophical grounds—it soon became apparent to him that he would find some difficulty in

discovering a lady of this pattern ready made who should listen to his suit. So he determined on the Great Adventure—the attempt to mould a suitable and tractable female character to his liking. This, apparently, was after his rejection by Miss Edgeworth, in 1768. A college friend, Mr. Bicknell, the same who assisted in the composition of *The Dying Negro*, lent his aid to this interesting experiment. Together the pair visited the Foundling Hospital at Shrewsbury, and selected two girls, each twelve years of age, “both beautiful, one fair, with flaxen locks and light eyes, whom he called Lucretia; the other, a clear auburn brunette, with darker eyes, more glowing bloom, and chestnut tresses, he called Sabrina.” A legal document was drawn up, under Bicknell’s direction (he was also reading for the Bar, if not already called), in which Day bound himself to treat the two girls generously. He was to choose between the two within a twelve-month, by which date he promised to provide handsomely for the discarded one. The other he would retain, with a view to marrying her—failing which, he engaged to maintain her in a respectable family until she married someone else, when he promised her a dowry of £500.

The experiment was not one likely to succeed outside the pages of fiction, or away from the boards of the theatre. It did not open fortunately. Day was so thorough in his methods, so ardent and radical in his pursuit of the ideal, that it cannot but be matter for surprise that he should have achieved even a partial success. He immediately went off to France with his two foundlings, not even taking with him an

English servant, so that they should be unable to imbibe any opinions but from his own lips. But the two young pupils proved more troublesome than the philosopher had anticipated. They teased and perplexed him with little jealousies and quarrels : worse still, they caught the small-pox, and their guardian found himself compelled to nurse them day and night, for they cried at the thought of being left with anyone who could not talk English. They recovered in time, and (as the chronicle gravely states) with beauty unimpaired by the disease. After eight months of foreign travel they returned to England. Lucretia proved something of a disappointment, and was placed in a milliner's establishment, subsequently marrying a linen-draper and drawing the stipulated dowry from her benefactor. Sabrina's future was a more difficult matter to settle. She showed signs of an affectionate disposition, of good sense, of the more engaging feminine qualities ; but she lacked the firmer Roman virtues, and not all her guardian's carefully prepared surprises could train her to a full command over herself. It must be admitted that he tried her rather severely. He dropped melting sealing-wax on her arms ; he fired pistols (blank charges, it is true) at her petticoats ; and reproached her for a not unnatural apprehension. He communicated to her pretended secrets, and was dissatisfied on finding that she told them to the servants. So at last Sabrina too vanished—to a boarding school at Sutton Coldfield in Warwickshire—and Day reverted to more ordinary paths of courtship. But the cinema films might surely make something out of these preliminary excursions.

Two sisters, the Misses Honora and Elizabeth Sneyd, were next to catch the philosopher's roving fancy. He proposed to each in turn. Honora refused him at once: Elizabeth held out some slight hopes. His appearance and manner were against him: she might possibly have endured him had he been a gentleman. So the worthy man, who did nothing by halves, went to Paris and took lessons for a year with a drilling and dancing-master, "pent up in durance vile for hours together, with his feet in the stocks, a book in his hand, and contempt in his heart." His friend Edgeworth discovered him in this condition. And after all this devotion the hard-hearted Elizabeth is said to have dismissed him on his return with the remark that on the whole Thomas Day, blackguard, was more pleasing to her than Thomas Day, gentleman. Curiously enough, both the sisters Sneyd afterwards married Edgeworth himself, in succession.

Probably the stony path of courtship has seldom presented more obstacles to any traveller of modern times. Day returned for a while to Sabrina, disheartened with repeated failure. She had grown into a charming woman, say the biographers, feminine, elegant and amiable, an ornament to her sex and to her position in life. But she could not, apparently, get over memories of that melted sealing-wax. She ultimately married Bicknell, the barrister friend who had assisted in drawing up the agreement at Shrewsbury.

Once again it was Dr. Small, that "able and candid" physician of Birmingham, who assisted him to choose a wife, as he had already guided him in the choice of a profession. Miss Esther

Milnes, of Wakefield, in Yorkshire, was the lady—" of prepossessing features, and of modest and retiring habits," and of a fortune about equal in value to his own. Daunted by many rebuffs, Day needed all the doctor's powers of persuasion to induce him to come forward once more. And then, even when his advances had been accepted, he must needs make conditions and terms. She was to renounce all the vanities and fashions of ordinary life : music (of which she was passionately fond) was sternly forbidden : all the work of the household (for this prophet of the simple life would keep no servant) was to be done with her own hands. But this time the admirable woman submitted patiently to all his demands, and after two years of probation they were married in 1778, and lived for eleven years together more harmoniously than might have been expected. Experimental philosophers of this type are rarely so well suited. The lady loved him, in spite of all his eccentricities. At Anningsley, in Surrey, where they passed the last few years of their married life, they spent time and money lavishly together in philanthropic schemes for the improvement of the condition of the neighbouring peasantry, keeping up (among other things) a farm of some size for the sole purpose of providing work for men who were out of employment. It was while engaged in supervising this estate that Day met with his death, being thrown by an unbroken colt that he was riding for the first time. He had always the courage of his opinions, and it was one of his favourite maxims that animals should be trained entirely by kindness.

Thomas Day was one of the first of a peculiar

breed, not commonly much liked by the general public, who are designated in these days "cranks." He possessed all the stigmata of the tribe. He took, wherever possible, the unpopular side: he was against slavery, and in favour of American Independence. He was, in fact, like the majority of cranks, the possessor of a logical brain uncorrected by a sense of perspective or of humour. There could not but be something of the ridiculous in such a search as that he prosecuted so long for the Ideal Housewife. And yet he had friends who loved him. Edgeworth spoke of him as "the most virtuous human being he had ever met," and though virtuous is but a cold word, the praise is something as from a model of robust sanity to a crank. At any rate, the man was something better than the sickly sentimentalist of whom he was supposed to be a disciple. If he is to be known as the English Rousseau, it may be conceded that he imported into his master's ideal of a simple life a touch of solid English honesty that made it, if a trifle ludicrous in places, at least not entirely a sham.

V

JOURNALISTS ON FICTION

IT used to happen, in the old days, that about once a year some one of our London papers would open its columns to the fascinating subject of novel-writing. This generally occurred towards the beginning of the autumn publishing season, when the air was already darkening with announcements of new books by the customary concocters of fiction, and it was recognised by the Business Manager that it might do no harm (from the point of view of securing advertisements) if his journal displayed an intelligent interest in the habits and customs of this singular tribe. After all, it was the slack time of year: most Londoners were out of town, enjoying their autumnal holiday among the grouse or the salmon. Parliament was up, and there were only the usual bickerings in the Balkans at the moment. So it happened that one of the young men of the paper received his instructions to start a lively discussion about some of those writing people, and in due course he announced his annual discovery. It might be that the novel had a tendency to increase in length, or it had been said that the love interest was going out of fashion, or possibly a discussion could be aroused on the amount of money to be earned by fiction-writing. In any case, the ball was

started rolling and, with any luck, the public (like an overgrown kitten) might continue to sport idly with it until something of real interest occurred. I have occasionally assisted myself at this game, and given the ball a slight push or two when required.

The real fun is, of course, to induce the Big Names to take a hand (of course for an adequate fee) and join amicably in the discussion about their own affairs. They are not always so difficult of capture as the layman might suppose, and I have known them learn to feed out of the editor's hand without more than an occasional angry rustle of the tail-feathers. I remember they flocked in quite merrily when there was this question about the proper measure for a modern work of fiction. About eighty thousand words, said some. That had become the modern standard of length: the modern reader could not be trusted to keep his attention at the stretch longer than that. But then the Caines and Corellis, the Hichenses and the Bennetts, ran sometimes to twice as much; and it could not be said that they were unpopular. Neither, surely, was it the case that the public could read more of them without boredom than of others; which put those who advocated, and practised, the shorter measure into something of a quandary. The controversy ran quite a respectable course until one too ingenious writer unfortunately put forward the unanswerable dictum that a novel should contain just as many words as were necessary for the adequate treatment of the story. Upon this the throng of popular novelists who had been contributing to the discussion retired sadly into their respective burrows, wishing no doubt

that they had been the first to think of this simple solution. But I do not know that many of them have acted upon it since.

It may have been the year after this that the literary world was concerned about the decay of love interest. Could it be true that love was taking only a secondary place in novels? A well-known publisher, realising the great truth that it is always worth while to get your name into the papers free of advertisement charges, came forward to say that very few novels were submitted to him in which love, romantic or otherwise, formed the chief motive. True, there was still, generally, a marriage somewhere in the book, but it no longer stood out as the one and only matter of real importance in the life of the characters concerned. Was it possible that our novelists were beginning to acquire a sense of proportion? Had they at last recognised that it might be possible to interest readers in other subjects? Probably not: it was merely that the well-known publisher had been led into producing one or two novels that season without quite as much of the old romantic flavour as the public wanted.

At the same time it is a not uninteresting question, this of the percentage of romantic love that should animate our fiction. Now and again I think it is just as well that we should vary our recipes a little, taking thought whether we have not been in the habit of putting in too much sugar for a really healthy palate. There was, for example, that Victorian formula, now fortunately extinct or on its way to extinction—the “happy-ever-after” school. It cannot be denied that this had begun to exasperate the judicious reader. The fiction-monger of that

epoch used to conduct his couple to the altar, after innumerable vicissitudes, and leave them there at the close of the last chapter, with the strains of Mendelssohn's Wedding March still ringing in their ears, in the tacit assumption that the real business of their lives was now over. Even in our youth we could never quite believe in this formula : it was too obviously at variance with the stern facts of human life. Clearly there were many married couples of our acquaintance whose state of bliss was incomplete. And though we knew very little in those days about the matter our minds rebelled against the thought that marriage should descend upon the happy couple like a rosy mist, cutting them off from any further participation in the drama of life. We were convinced that the most interesting period of their career was just beginning. They had only a superficial knowledge of each other's characters. They may have been devotedly attached to the ideals they had formed in their own minds, but we had a shrewd suspicion that these would not survive very long the closer analysis of domestic life. How would she get on with the servants, and how would he behave under the stress of leaking water-pipes and kitchen boilers and the noise of fractious or playful children ? Clearly the wedding bells should come at the beginning or middle of a story rather than at the end.

The old Victorian formula is not dead. In all probability it will last as long as the art of fiction. But at least it is not now universally practised. Novelists have of late shown a tendency to split up into sections ; and those who still affect the romantic love-story, pure and simple, have dropped to a somewhat

lower plane in the estimation of critical readers. They still have their stars: some writers in this form, I need not mention names, enjoy larger sales than many men with more admired reputations. But they appeal to a less sophisticated circle—which, from the commercial point of view, it may be argued, is the best circle to address. It is large, and growing: year by year the half-educated mass of the population assists to swell its ranks. We possess at the present time a class of readers who have just been admitted to the simpler joys of literature. They are, as yet, easily tired: they do not want anything that makes the slightest demand upon their dormant faculty of reason: they require stories with a sufficiency of exciting incident and as much sentiment as can be crowded between the covers of a single book. To these the romantic love-story, in all its pristine simplicity, still makes the strongest appeal, and the enterprising craftsman who gave them anything else would soon find the best of reasons for regretting his temerity. Numerically, the domestic servant and the wife of the small tradesman make up the bulk of our novel-readers to-day. And these want Romance, and plenty of it. For them our industrious leaders of the book market contrive their entrancing stories of noblemen who seek their mates, not in the gilded halls of their peers, but from the flower-girls of Piccadilly Circus or from the beggar-maidens who wander homeless on the Thames Embankment. It does not concern them that the flower-sellers in the Circus are mostly ladies of a mature age, and that beggar-maidens are rarely, if ever, discoverable on the Embankment. Their work

is not intended to bear any relation to life as it is : they depict some imaginary fairyland in which the conventions of generations of sentimental predecessors take the place of real facts.

Some years ago the journalist used to make great play with the name of my old friend Charles Garvice. Before his time, towards the end of the nineteenth century, Marie Corelli was chief target for most of the critics' harmless shafts : if an editor wished to test a young reviewer's talent for smart writing he handed over to him the latest Corelli for slaughter. Unless he could bring out something really biting on the author of *The Sorrows of Satan* he was justly considered hopeless. I do not know who can be considered the legitimate successor of Miss Corelli. Perhaps Miss Ethel M. Dell : possibly the creator of *Tarzan of the Apes*. It is a beneficent dispensation of Providence that the butt should occasionally be changed, and in any case I do not suppose that the occupier of the post much minds. There are compensations. To be chosen for the part he must be, at least, a Commercial Success.

Whenever there is any discussion on literary incomes the journalist of to-day would probably begin with Mr. A. S. M. Hutchinson or Mr. Gilbert Frankau : before the War he would probably have started with Charles Garvice. I have seen all sorts of fancy figures put down for these names, from ten thousand pounds a year upwards, and very possibly our journalists are sometimes under-estimating the amount. I have no objection. Some people seem to think that monetary rewards should be reserved for those who write impeccable English. They forget that the niceties of language, the

selection of the right word, the construction of rhythmic sentences, are only a small part of the novelist's trade. The essential part of his business is to tell a story. And, so strangely are we constituted, you shall find the most unliterary persons dowered with this gift, while many who can coin phrases to admiration lack altogether the power of narrative.

Appreciation of a good story is common to most, but it takes some education to be able to appreciate good writing. Consequently no one need be surprised if the earnings of the story-teller sometimes exceed those of the literary craftsman. But there is no reason that I can see why anyone should get angry about it. You and I may not care much for the work of a Caine, a Corelli, an Ethel Dell, or even a Hutchinson: there are many who care less for the novels of Wells, or Bennett, or Galsworthy. The fact remains that if the popular writers have secured (as they undoubtedly have) a faithful public, this is not due to the action of some blind chance. They have shown some merit that our dull brains have not hitherto succeeded in perceiving. There is an indefinable something in their work that grips a section of the reading public which has eluded you and me with careless ease. It should be our business to discover and analyse this element in the composition of their genius, instead of complaining about the taste of the public or the way in which some writers prostitute their slender talents for the sake of filthy lucre.

I remember seeing it once stated in an article that a moderately successful novelist in this country can make money at the rate of ten pounds for every hour of his working time. My

journalistic friends are perhaps a little prone to exaggerate, but if we allow a wide meaning for the word "moderately," and restrict the phrase "working time" to mean actual time spent in writing or dictation, the estimate may be passed as not too wide of the mark—for pre-War days. What with dramatic and cinema and translation rights, a good Caine or Corelli may have brought in as much as twenty thousand pounds. Clearly, from the commercial point of view, the earnings of a successful novelist, even if he restricts himself to a single book a year, would compare favourably with those of most learned professions.

At the same time, there are few of these really big sellers. My intrepid journalist went on to say that there were barely ten novelists in the country who earned more than five thousand a year from fiction alone. I agree, too, that five thousand, with a few unconsidered trifles from theatres and films, is (or was before the War) a reasonable income, sufficient for a careful man. George Meredith, I believe, never received so much as a thousand pounds in a year from the sale of his novels. He wrote for posterity, you may say, but many of those who aim steadfastly at an immediate popularity fail even to reach his modest figure. The actual sales of a fairly well-known novelist often fall sadly below the generous estimate of those who have read some of his books. There are writers enough whose names are esteemed by the judicious who rarely contrive to sell more than two thousand copies of a novel in an English edition.

The fact is, that in recent years every change that has been made in the world of publishing and bookselling has been in favour of the few

big sellers and against the author with a small, if select, audience. The cheap sixpenny and sevenpenny editions that we had before the War were all to the good of the popular writer: they gave his novels another lease of life, and himself another set of royalties. More than this, they assisted in spreading his name and fame among a class of readers whom he had perhaps not reached before. But these cheap novels, excellently produced as they were, and eagerly welcomed by the railway traveller and the lover of fiction who could not afford to buy crown octavo volumes at six shillings apiece, got sadly in the way of the less successful novelist who was accustomed to receive his fifty or a hundred pounds down in advance on account of royalties. Now that prices of novels are beginning to rise again, it is possible that his lot may become easier, but I doubt it. The cost of production has increased also, to such a degree that publishers look askance at any author who can only claim a small following. He may become popular in time, it is true; but again he may not; and even if he does it is highly probable that some enterprising agent will entice him away to another firm just as he is beginning to show signs of becoming a good investment. I have often wondered how some of our great novelists of the past would have fared if they had been born in the present age of cheap books. Meredith himself, for example. He had the fortune to produce most of his early fiction under the old system of the three-volume novel—a system that ensured some monetary return for good though not necessarily popular work. If a new Meredith were to arise to-day it is not impossible that his

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publishers would get tired of producing his books at a loss before he had succeeded in educating a sufficient section of the reading public into a proper and profitable appreciation of his genius.

VI

“THE BOTANIC GARDEN”

IN the second half of the eighteenth century, when the great Dr. Johnson was still the recognised arbiter of things literary, there had sprung up in his native town of Lichfield a little band of singers whose verses made no small stir in their time. Indeed, those were great days for the poetical tribe. Decasyllabics were still in vogue—the easiest of all verses to write respectably—and any gentleman who had cultivated the art of smooth versification had as good a chance of finding readers (or perhaps even a better) in rhyme as in plain prose. Things are sadly changed now; and it would surprise us not a little if some modern professor—Sir Oliver Lodge, for example—were to choose the medium of rhymed heroics for the exposition of his latest scientific speculations. We are grown rather intolerant of unnecessary ornament in philosophical writings. If a man has anything of importance to say, from the point of view of science, we should regard him as no better than a madman if he attempted to gain our ear by enclosing his theories in rhyme, as one might conceal powders in jam. Yet Dr. Erasmus Darwin, happy man! living in an age less infected with materialism, found his masterpiece received with acclamation enough, and paid for by the publishers (so the record

runs) at the rate of ten shillings a line. Better poets have been worse paid, before and since the time of the ingenious physician.

Those who are acquainted with the works of the late Samuel Butler are aware, at least, of the name of Erasmus Darwin. Butler did not, however, introduce his name into his books from any burning admiration for his poetry : he merely seized upon him as a possible stick with which to belabour his celebrated grandson, the author of *The Origin of Species*. In his own day it is possible that the learned doctor was regarded as more poet than scientist : time, and Samuel Butler, may have done something to bring about a juster opinion. It is interesting to note that the physician hesitated for some time before coming forward as an acknowledged poet. He saw the possible professional danger. But his Lichfield friends pleaded, with well-judged flattery, that while there might have been some danger on his first commencing the medical profession, now that his reputation was so firmly established all risk of injury to it was precluded. Besides, was not the subject of the proposed poem connected with pathology ?

Erasmus Darwin, born of a good Lincolnshire stock and educated at Chesterfield School, graduated at St. John's College, Cambridge, in 1750, thus adding one more to the long list of poets hailing from the mathematical university. The once celebrated Dr. Dodd (the fashionable preacher who suffered the extreme penalty of the law for forgery) had but just gone down from Clare Hall ; and in common with him and the majority of poets in England at that time, Darwin found himself inspired by the death of Frederick, Prince of Wales, to add his con-

tribution to the chorus of musical lamentation called forth by that unhappy event. But the muse had, for the time, to give way to medicine, and Darwin proceeded to Edinburgh for further study. In 1755 he took his M.B. degree and settled down in the following year to practise in Nottingham. Thence he moved to Lichfield, and very soon was earning something like a thousand pounds a year in the exercise of his profession, and taking also a prominent place in the literary society of that city. He met, and subsequently corresponded with, Jean Jacques Rousseau. Miss Seward, the “Swan of Lichfield,” was on intimate terms with him; and he became acquainted with such prominent scientists as Boulton, Watt and Wedgwood. The doctor himself had no small share of inventive genius, tending perhaps in rather impracticable directions. He invented an aerial machine, in which he proposed to use wings like those of a bird, worked by high-pressure steam. Kindred tastes led to a correspondence with R. L. Edgeworth, father of the famous instructress of our youth, and hence came an introduction to Thomas Day, then busied in his long quest for a model wife. He met, and disliked, Johnson. Perhaps these literary acquaintances stimulated his fancy, but he displayed no indecent haste. It was not until 1778 that he bought a “little wild umbrageous valley,” about a mile from Lichfield, which he improved by widening and altering the course of a brook that ran through it, and formed the botanica garden that was to bring him fame.

Eleven years later, after his second marriage, appeared *The Loves of the Plants*, which now stands as the second part of the complete poem.

It was of a piece with his eccentric character to publish the second part first : probably he considered it the better of the two. The book was mostly written in his travelling carriage, which was furnished with paper, pencils and books—and also with other luxuries. The first part, *The Economy of Vegetation*, did not come out for three years more.

It is to Miss Seward (whom, by the way, Miss Mitford called “ a Dr. Darwin in petticoats ”) that we owe the conception of the *Botanic Garden* ; and indeed some of the introduction was actually written by her. She wrote a short poem about his little wilderness outside Lichfield, which so pleased him that he declared it ought to form the exordium of a great work. The lady gracefully declined to undertake it—“ the plan was not strictly proper for a female pen ”—but she felt that such a scheme was eminently adapted to his own fancy. Mutual politeness was ever one of the outstanding characteristics of the Lichfield literary circle ; and after a further exchange of courtesies Darwin began his task, opening with the very lines that the lady had sent him. No acknowledgment was made of their source, which was a decided lapse from the best Lichfield standards, and the fair author was justly offended. A certain coolness sprang up between the two. The doctor had added to his crime by making a few alterations, which were not considered improvements, in her lines.

The general design of Darwin’s poem, as he himself phrased it, was to “ inlist Imagination under the banner of Science ; and to lead her votaries from the loose analogies, which dress out the imagery of poetry, to the stricter ones

which form the ratiocination of philosophy." He embellished his work with numerous notes, which indeed were sufficiently necessary to the uninitiated, for his passion for grandiose language was such that he could never deliver a plain statement in a simple form. Endowed with a good ear for rhythm, and a fertile fancy, he crowded his work with tropes and personifications, and polished his couplets until their smoothness become monotonous. He had unfortunate theories about poetry—one being that every line should present a finished picture to the reader; and this conviction tended to produce a sadly artificial effect in so long a poem. His lines are overloaded with epithet: they are all cut to the same pattern; and after a time we long for more freedom and less ingenuity. Yet he was undoubtedly an original thinker and a clever versifier.

Darwin's "philosophical notes" are filled with curious information. The glorification of the Linnæan system was his theme, but he did not confine himself too closely to any one subject. He took all science for his province, and in particular delighted in prophetic anticipation of the wonders of the future—of marvels that might be worked by the use of gunpowder, and steam, and electricity. He has a characteristic passage on gunpowder, which may be quoted here as a fair specimen of his style:—

Pent in dark chambers of cylindric brass,
Slumbers in grim repose the sooty mass;
Lit by the brilliant spark, from grain to grain
Runs the quick fire along the kindling train;
On the pain'd ear-drum bursts the sudden crash,
Starts the red flame, and Death pursues the flash—

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to which he appends a note predicting that “from the cheapness with which a very powerful gunpowder is likely soon to be manufactured from aerated marine acid . . . it may probably in time be used to move machines, and supersede the use of steam.” Those who are fond of tracing the fulfilment of prophecy will no doubt consider that these words indicated the coming of the internal-combustion engine.

With regard to steam itself he uttered at least one fortunate prediction. His friend Boulton had lately constructed at “Soho, near Birmingham, a most magnificent apparatus for coining,” worked by an improved steam engine, which the poet describes at some length :—

Descending screws with ponderous fly-wheels
wound

The tawny plates, the new medallions round ;
Hard dyes of steel the cupreous circles cramp,
And with quick fall the massy hammers stamp.
The Harp, the Lily, and the Lion join,
And George and Britain guard the sterling coin—
Soon shall thy arm, *Unconquer'd Steam!* afar
Drag the slow barge, or drive the rapid car ;
Or on wide-waving wings expanded bear
The flying-chariot through the fields of air.

When we recollect the date of these lines, published in 1792, but known to have been written at least ten years earlier, it may be admitted that Darwin displayed no inconsiderable powers of discernment. On electricity, then but a toy, he touches immediately afterwards, but has nothing of note to venture on this point, except to suggest that rain might be drawn from the clouds, as Franklin with his kite had drawn the lightning. But he is

prettily descriptive on the beauties of several drawing-room experiments apparently much in vogue among the fair philosophers of Lichfield :—

Or, if on wax some fearless Beauty stand,
And touch the sparkling rod with graceful hand ;
Through her fine limbs the mimic lightnings dart,
And flames innocuous eddy round her heart ;
O'er her fair brow the kindling lustres glare ;
Blue rays diverging from the bristling hair ;
While some fond Youth the kiss ethereal sips,
And soft fires issue from their meeting lips.

Things of this sort interest our genial physician immensely. It is not, at first sight, easy to see what connection steam, or gunpowder, or electricity have with the study of botany and the Linnæan system, but the learned doctor sweeps them all into his capacious net. He cannot even withhold his pen from the "sympathetic inks made by Zaffre." He had the right roving spirit.

I confess to a kindness for *The Loves of the Plants*, now standing as the second part of the *Botanic Garden*. Canning and Frere burlesqued it in their *Loves of the Triangles*, but it was an unnecessary task. Nobody could parody such glorious magniloquence. The luxuriance of conceits in this poem is incomparable ; the personification of the plants sublimely ridiculous. "The Linnæan system," wrote Darwin to Miss Seward, when suggesting the subject for her pen, "is unexplored poetic ground, and a happy subject for the Muses. It affords fine scope for poetic landscape ; it suggests metamorphoses of the Ovidian kind, though reversed. Ovid made men and women into flowers, plants and

trees. You shall make flowers, plants and trees into men and women." When his correspondent modestly refused the task, it may be seen with what gusto Darwin carried out his Ovidian idea. I may mention that the fair damsel of the following passage is a species of *conferva* (*Anglicé* sea-weed) :—

Night's tinsel beams on smooth Lock Lomond
dance,
Impatient *ÆGA* views the bright expanse ;—
In vain her eyes the passing floods explore,
Wave after wave rolls freightless to the shore.
—Now dim amid the distant foam she spies
A rising speck—" 'Tis he ! 'tis he ! " she cries ;
As with firm arms he beats the streams aside,
And cleaves with rising chest the tossing tide,
With bended knee she prints the humid sands,
Upturns her glistening eyes, and spreads her
hands—

And upon this affecting picture of the meeting of two pieces of green floating weed there follows a long simile :—

So on her sea-girt tower fair *Hero* stood—

which is surely as bold a comparison as the most audacious of parodists would dare to insert. I have never been able to discover anything equal to this in Canning's burlesque.

VII

THE LITERARY AGENT

I AM, unfortunately, old enough to remember the days when the literary agent made his first appearance (under that name) in the world of writers, and was hailed with enthusiasm by the authors of that epoch as a harbinger of brighter days. For in those far-off times the Man of Letters knew himself to be no Man of Business: he confessed it even with a sort of pride. What had a writer of books to do with this pettifogging affair of getting paid for the books he produced? The publisher gave him something for his trouble, and it was not the part of an artist or of a gentleman to cavil at the amount. We still had our literary traditions, dating from the days when Lord Byron considered it beneath the dignity of a peer to receive remuneration for his copyrights. Mr. R. C. Dallas, who arranged for the publication of *Childe Harold* with John Murray, divided the profits of that transaction with the publisher. In a sense, he may be counted as the first literary agent of whom we have actual knowledge, and he was well rewarded for his pains. Our authors to-day are beginning to complain about the far more modest rate of commission charged by his successors in a growing trade.

The literary agent, I suppose, evolved himself out of the literary executor. It was early

recognised as a convenience that some duly authorised person, equipped with a knowledge of business as well as of letters, should take over the task of collecting and publishing such stray fragments as might be left unedited at the writer's death. His pay varied. Sometimes it was considered that the honour of his position, together with the opportunity of compiling an *Authorised Biography*, furnished sufficient remuneration : sometimes, on the other hand, a mass of material was left to him at his absolute discretion to use, if he chose, for his own profit. Out of this welter of confusion emerged by slow degrees the great principle of the ten per cent. commission, in defence of which the modern agent is prepared to fight to the last gasp. Not long ago there were indications that the battle was imminent, but more material warfare intervened ; and as yet the dispute has not been revived. Still, the literary agent may have to fight for his rights, in due time. These are revolutionary days.

For a long time, when his business was yet a novelty, the agent received nothing but praise from the authors who employed him. I have seen the day when successful novelists used to button-hole their less successful brethren at clubs, and urge them, with tears in their voice, to follow the path that led so easily to glory and increased royalties. I perceive that you shrug your shoulders here, and smile : you find it difficult to believe that successful novelists should be so anxious to assist their brethren in the craft. Believe me, there is hardly any act of kindness that some of our friends at the top of the tree will not do to help those struggling painfully in the mire beneath.

I admit they are not so keen to give a hand to those who show signs of getting somewhere near their own lofty branch. Why should they be? Perhaps the branch looks hardly strong enough to carry another: perhaps they feel themselves already rather crowded and uncomfortable. Yes! I have known them give these others a sly push, when nobody was looking their way, for self-preservation is the first law, even with writers of fiction. This, however, is wandering slightly from the point.

The example and precept of these excellent fellows had an obvious effect. One by one the conservative gentlemen of the old school, who exist in literature as in other professions, fell into line and began to talk about "my agent" with a pleasant sense of business acumen. It really was a great point to have a representative who could be trusted to do the unpleasant part of the business—who could approach the matter of selling a book or an article without being hampered by any absurd considerations of sentiment, or any ridiculous qualms of nervousness. The publisher, of course, made a fuss over the innovation: he talked a good deal about the rare old times when there was a real friendship between author and publisher: he trotted out a number of musty old stories about generous publishers of the past who had gone beyond the terms of their original agreements and handed over cheques for large amounts to writers who had made an unexpected success. He instanced firms who had undertaken, and paid liberally for, works that could not be expected to show a profit for many years to come, if at all. This sort of thing, he intimated in conclusion, could not be expected to

continue if the literary agent were allowed to interpose himself as a middleman. In a very little time the publisher would be squeezed dry : not a drop of the milk of human kindness would be left in him. In effect, he desired to point out that the author could not have it both ways. Either let him be a friend, or a grasping man of business. If he chose to be the latter (by proxy) he must not complain if he were treated according to the strict letter of the agreement. In short, the author must not expect any more cheques by way of bonus if he employed an agent to make his contracts for him.

The author, I regret to say, made fun of these protestations in a manner that must have caused his old friend and ally considerable pain. He said rudely that he did not want his friendship ; that he preferred the cash ; and that this so-called friendship, in any case, had been nothing but a specious cloak beneath which the publisher had been wont to conceal his grasping and avaricious hands. It was now the author's turn, and he meant to do a little squeezing on his own account. I must admit that the literary gentleman here triumphed rather too openly for my taste : he displayed something too much of that exultant pride so distasteful to the Greek tragedians. It was felt that he might be preparing a scourge for the Fates to use upon himself in his turn. Yet it is difficult to blame him too severely. The sudden acquisition of money is at least as intoxicating as strong drink. For centuries the author had been kept very short of cash. Since Samuel Johnson first turned for support from the patron to the bookseller, the capitalist had

almost uniformly secured the better side of the bargain. But then, the capitalist commonly does this in most trades: if he fails, he soon ceases to be a capitalist. I do not know that the publisher had behaved worse to his authors than the employer in general had to his labourers. But of late years Labour has been showing a decided tendency to squeeze Capital, and it was not to be expected that writers (whose work, after all, demands a modicum of brains) should lag behind their brother operatives. They could not very well organise a strike, but at least they could sell their wares to the highest bidder, and employ a man of business to superintend the sale and the subsequent collection of money that might become due.

There are now, I suppose, some dozen or more literary agents of repute settled in this city of London. There are many more, no doubt, whose methods will not bear investigation—men who live upon the fees they contrive to extract from young and inexperienced authors before they make any pretence of exhibiting their work to editors or publishers. It is improbable that these make much profit out of the business. But the few who are perched securely at the top of the tree have done very well for themselves—so well that the author, forgetful of the benefits he has reaped from their services in the past, is already beginning to turn round and ask why he should pay these high rates of commission for work that he could (as he sometimes says) do just as easily himself. Ten per cent. may be all very well at the start, say for one year after publication, to pay for the labour involved in selling the book. But take the case

of a work that continues to bring in royalties for years, and ask yourself if it is fair that a middleman should be empowered to deduct ten per cent. from these for a mere collection of accounts. You and I, looking at the matter from a purely disinterested standpoint, would probably shrug our shoulders and say that we should be only too glad to get the money, less any amount of commission. But this is a matter of principle, not a mere theme for idle jesting.

With the accumulation of wealth, it may be noted, Avarice increases. The author does not think of grumbling at the agent who deducts a sovereign from a ten-pound account, or even ten pounds from a hundred; but when the amounts begin to run into higher figures he asks himself whether the middleman is so indispensable after all. And of course the agent is not indispensable by any means: he is merely a convenience. There have not been wanting authors of eminence to declare roundly that they would have none of him, that they could manage their own affairs without his assistance, at a saving both in temper and in pocket. I seem to remember wild words of this sort (perhaps since recanted) by H. G. Wells and Hall Caine. On the other hand, Arnold Bennett has acknowledged eloquently his indebtedness to the tribe of agents, and the late Charles Garvice once assured us that the more his commission account came to the better he was pleased. Which seems, on the face of it, a reasonable enough way of regarding the matter.

The agent has done so much for the author during the last twenty years that it seems the

basest ingratitude to cavil at the amount of his profit. It is all very well for the successful novelist to allege that he can make better terms for himself with the publishers, but it was the agent who showed him the way to do so. Yet it may be that the middleman has now become somewhat careless over the performance of his trust. Complaints have been made that, when once the contract has been drawn up for the publication of a book or the production of a drama, the agent does nothing more to earn his commission. He does not, for example, keep his eye upon publisher or producer to see that the terms of the contract are fulfilled. In cases where there is delay in the furnishing of accounts (and heaven knows that most publishers are reprehensibly slow in paying up their royalties) the agent is beginning, they say, to make excuses. He has been known to urge that, if he presses too hardly for immediate settlement, he may prejudice his position as to placing other manuscripts. When the accounts do at last come in, it is stated that they are too often not in accord with the agreements. In short, the author is oppressed with doubts whether his new servant is not attempting the difficult task of serving two masters. It is significant that the publisher no longer displays his old objection to the agent. Cases have even been reported where he has expressed a preference for dealing with them rather than with the author direct. This, not unnaturally, has given rise to horrid suspicions. What consideration does the publisher receive from the agent to induce this attitude? Somehow he appears to have made terms with his ancient enemy, and the soul of the author is vexed within him.

The agent is suspected now of acting as principal—of having sometimes a financial interest in some of the firms with which he deals.

To my own mind the chief objection to the agent is that sometimes he exercises a bad influence over his tender charges. He has been known to appeal to their cupidity, to indicate to them, in no uncertain manner, that they should write stories in a certain manner which they have already proved to be a success rather than adventure gaily forth into new fields, to their own ultimate advantage and that of their art. The agent likes a certainty : he is apt to incite the author who has made a lucky hit to imitate himself, and perhaps to go on attempting to reproduce his first happy effort *ad infinitum*. But this sort of objection does not appear in the sober pages of that excellent but commercial organ, the *Author*. There they confine themselves to this matter of the ten per cent. commission. And no doubt it is a nuisance. It goes on and on : there is no getting rid of it : it is as certain as the income tax, and, like the income tax, it is deducted from dividends at the source. So long as a book continues to sell, so long do the royalties come in shorn of their just amount by one-tenth. I have heard some say that there will have to be an amending of the contract, and a time limit. The point is one that is not likely to interest any but the successful writer, but it interests him very much indeed.

VIII

FULLER'S " WORTHIES "

THOMAS FULLER, divine and historian, possessed the sort of mind that sees everything in terms of an antithesis. " All that time I could not live to study, who did only study to live," he says in excusing himself for the non-appearance of his *Church History*. Wit, as Coleridge says, was the " stuff and substance " of his intellect. And perhaps, with many who have acquired a reputation for being amusing fellows, this has stood in the way of a more serious reputation among the critics.

He was surely the chief of all loiterers in literature, the prince of desultory writers. He had the true spirit of your antiquarian, ever ready to pursue some interesting legend and track it to its source, without troubling overmuch about the precise connection it might have with the subject he was treating at the moment. To him digression was not merely a pleasing ornament, but a positive necessity, and his method of writing (if indeed it can be called a method) was so contrived as to secure for himself the greatest latitude possible. Thus he divides even his histories into a series of disconnected paragraphs, so as to be able to include anything of interest that may catch his attention as he pursues his rambling path. In the *History of the Worthies of England* the

inconsequent scheme specially suited him. He had here the fuller scope—not perhaps that this made much difference to so inveterate a wanderer—but the plan of the work was in harmony with his nature. The result is a most fascinating book—a generous medley of facts, anecdotes, antiquarian lore, illuminated at every turn by flashes of unexpected wit. To read the *Worthies* is like holding a friendly conversation with the man himself, and that man one of the most entertaining of his age.

Thomas Fuller, second of that name, was born in 1608, son of the rector of St. Peter's, Aldwinckle, Northamptonshire. He seems to have entered at Queens' College, Cambridge, at the somewhat early age of twelve—probably in order to secure the interest of his uncle, Dr. Davenant, who was then Master of the college, and afterwards Bishop of Salisbury. In spite of this high connection, young Fuller failed to obtain a fellowship, and migrated to Sidney Sussex as a fellow-commoner. In 1630 yet another foundation, Corpus Christi, appointed him perpetual curate of St. Benet's—an incumbency chiefly remarkable from the fact that he buried there Hobson the carrier, famous by tradition and Miltonic verse. Thence he went to Broad Winsor, in Dorsetshire, married his first wife, and baptised his son John, afterwards to edit *The Worthies of England*. But his wife died within a year, and the bereaved widower went next to London, where he was appointed to a lectureship at the Savoy. A sermon preached at Westminster Abbey gave offence to the Parliamentary party, and probably decided him to join the king at Oxford. Here, however, he contrived to offend the

royalists almost as much, by another sermon preached at the king's request. His enemies have occasionally accused Fuller of being a "trimmer," but this sort of trimming seldom leads to wealth or position. However, it is true enough that after these two initial errors he contrived to steer a fairly successful course. The fact was, no man was ever less of a bigot, and when party feeling ran high he proved too benevolent to please either side. Later, the moderation of his views proved more acceptable.

His living having been sequestered by order of Parliament, Fuller applied for and obtained a chaplaincy in the royalist forces. He served with Sir Ralph Hopton's regiment until that very staunch loyalist met with defeat at Cheriton in March 1644, when he retreated to Basing House, where he took an active part in a famous defence. It was no doubt in these marchings and countermarchings in the west country that he collected much of his material, both for the *Church History* and *The Worthies*. He did not long survive the Restoration, though his services were rewarded with a doctor's degree at Cambridge and he was made chaplain-in-extraordinary to Charles II. Had he lived a few months longer he would probably have received a bishopric. But he was seized with typhus fever while preaching at the Savoy and died (after being copiously bled, in the fashion of the time) at his new lodgings in Covent Garden. The date was the 16th of August 1661. A year later the *History of the Worthies of England* was given to the world by his son, with an apologetic preface. Fourteen cities or counties remained unprinted at his death.

The design of *The Worthies* is set forth, characteristically enough, in the author's introduction.

England may fitly be compared to an House not *very great*, but *convenient*, and the several Shires may properly be resembled to the *rooms* thereof. Now, as learned Master *Camden* and painful Master *Speed* with others, have discribed the rooms themselves ; so is it our intention, God willing, to discribe the *furniture* of those *rooms*.

Learned Master *Camden* may be known to some of us by name as the author of *Britannia* and the *Annals of the Reign of Elizabeth*. Painful Master *Speed* is John Speed, the historian, who sufficiently earned his epithet by the production of a long series of works that began with *A Description of England and Wales*, and went on to *A prospect of the most famous parts of the world—together with all the provinces, counties and shires contained in Great Brittain's Empire*. He “discribed the rooms” adequately, with maps, adding such text as seemed necessary, and has the reputation of having collected valuable material for the use of his followers. Fuller set himself to import into these dry works a certain human interest. In his own words, he propounded these “five ends” :—

- First *To gain some Glory to God.*
- Secondly *To preserve the Memories of the Dead.*
- Thirdly *To present Examples to the Living.*
- Fourthly *To entertain the Reader with Delight.*
- And lastly (which I am not ashamed publicly to profess) *To procure some honest profit to my self.*

Fuller confesses, or boasts, elsewhere, that no stationer had ever suffered loss by him, from which we may assume that he was one of the earliest authors to make an income from the booksellers. But I suspect he was, at heart, more interested in his fourth "end," for we find him confessing a little later on (no doubt with a view to excusing his many digressions) that "to this end I have purposely interlaced (not as meat, but as condiment) many delightful stories that so the Reader may arise Jucundior, if not Religiosior or Doctior." It was ever his desire to put the reader at once upon an amiable footing with himself. His condiment was good enough. But it follows perhaps from this openly confessed method that the book is hardly one to be read through at a sitting: like all these works by professed rambles, it should be opened here and there, according to the reader's mood of the moment. Dipped into after this desultory fashion, it will yield pearls that are worth preserving.

Fuller had a humorous outlook upon life. No man of his time was quicker at perceiving latent comedy. Even upon the most serious subjects—as when describing some unparalleled disaster—he could not refrain from employing just that one turn of phrase that brought out the laughable side of the matter. I suspect this peculiarity was responsible for much of his popularity as a preacher. Congregations like a sense of humour in the pulpit, and sometimes his flock must have been hard put to it to restrain an outburst of unseemly laughter. Not that there was any lack of reverence in him for sacred subjects: it was rather the overflowing good nature of a pious man whose mind

had an unusual aptitude for discovering whimsical analogies.

No more amiable character has ever so engagingly expressed itself in literature. His writings give the impression of one who passed a sunny and happy existence, little disturbed by the "drums and tramlings" in which he took so active a share. With all his wit—and he had a power of caustic sarcasm surpassed by few—he was never malignant: there is no afterthought of bitterness about his gibes: in an age of bigotry and intolerance he was one of the very few who could speak of Papist and Puritan alike without bitterness. And he could enjoy any sort of jest—even a joke directed against himself. His was an age when humour was still unsophisticated. It was not considered derogatory to pun upon a proper name—he tells us himself somewhere the sad history of one *Nequam*, whose name became the vehicle for so many jokes "which indeed made themselves" in a time when even your village jester knew some Latin, that he was forced to change the orthography to *Neckam* in the hope of decomposing such conceits for the future. His own name was scarcely less open a mark for such as conceived themselves happy in this form of wit. He writes to one such with a pleasant mingling of humour and dignity, "I had rather my name should make any causelessly merry, than any justly sad; and, seeing it lieth equally open and obvious to praise and dispraise, I shall as little be elated when flattered—'Fuller of wit and learning' as dejected when flouted—'Fuller of folly and ignorance.'"

The eighty pages or so of introductory

matter with which Fuller prefaces his *Worthies*, detailing and defining (with numerous divagations) the purpose and scope of his work, form by no means the least interesting part of his book. He is always at his best in definitions, in discriminations, and in suggesting ingenious derivations. His definition of a proverb is as good as most—"Much matter decocted into few words." And he proceeds to name the six essentials of one of these crystals of common wisdom, namely, that it should be :—

1. Short	} Otherwise it is no <i>Proverb</i> but a	1. Oration
2. Playn		2. Riddle
3. Common		3. Secret
4. Figurative		4. Sentence
5. Antient		5. Upstart
6. True		6. Libel

This, again, is how he deals with Saints, a controversial word in those days :—

The word accepts of several interpretations, or rather they are injuriously obtruded upon it.

1. *Saints of Fiction*, who never were *in rerum natura*, as *St. Christopher*, &c.

2. *Saints of Faction*, wherewith our age doth swarme, alledging two arguments for their Saintship. First, that they so call themselves. Secondly, that those of their own party call them so. Neither of these belong to our cognizance.

3. *Saints of Superstition*, reputed so by the Court of *Rome*.

4. *Saints indeed*, parallel to *St. Paul's Widows indeed*, and both deserve to be honoured.

And here, once more, is a perverse derivation, referring to the popular saying (which touched himself rather nearly) that clergymen's sons,

since the Reformation, were commonly unsuccessful—"dissolute in their *Lives*, and doleful in their *Deaths*; This I may call a *Libell* indeed; according to Sir *Francis Bacon* his description thereof; for first, it is a *Lye*, a *notorious untruth*; and then a *Bell*, some *lowd* and *lewd* Tongue hath *told*, yea *Rung* it out, and perchance was welcome Musick to some hearers thereof." The derivation was borrowed, it is true, but the setting and the application are his own.

Historical accuracy, as we reckon it now, was perhaps not our author's strongest point, and indeed he lays no claim to aught but a certain industry in collecting. He quotes, with approval, the old saying, "Almost and very nigh Have saved many a Lie"; and if there is any real doubt about the authenticity of any tale he narrates, does not scruple to say so. After the manner of Herodotus, and with an equally charming simplicity of manner, he sweeps cheerfully into his drag-net all that comes his way—curious and amusing traditions, quaint proverbs and sayings, droll anecdotes; but does not make any pretence of having sifted his evidence, or of having sought carefully to discriminate between conflicting accounts. Not that I would accuse him of carelessness or indolence. The mere accumulation of his material must have entailed considerable labour. For a historian of that epoch, he might be called exceptionally diligent in research. By his own account, he consulted in the compilation of *The Worthies* four chief sources of information—printed books, records in the public offices, manuscripts in private hands, and the oral testimony of relations.

This may mean, of course, a good deal less than it would seem. But the evidence of such industry as he employed is obscured in any case by the haphazard arrangement of his matter. I am not concerned to apologise for the royalist chaplain, working in such times. History states that his books and documents were lost at the time of the sequestration of his living, and it must have been difficult, in his peregrinations with Sir Ralph Hopton and others, to keep his notes and memoranda in a really satisfactory manner. But we are not to regard Fuller's work from the standpoint of a modern historian. Some of his tales may be of doubtful authority, but I should be sorry if he had omitted any of them from his collection on the ground of historical inaccuracy.

The scheme of *The Worthies* is simplicity itself. In alphabetical order the author takes the counties of England and, under various headings, discourses at large on their most interesting products and peculiarities. His native county (of Northampton) may suffice to give some notion of his method and manner. He begins, naturally, with a few remarks on its geographical position, and then proceeds to discuss its natural commodities. Saltpetre and pigeons—a sufficiently curious conjunction—seem to have been Northamptonshire's staple merchandise in the seventeenth century. Of manufactures, he declares that there are few worth naming. "It is *enough* for *Northamptonshire*," he writes, with his customary profusion of italic letters, "to sell their *Wooll*, whilst that other *Countrys* make cloath thereof. . . . However the *Town* of *Northampton* may be said to *stand chiefly* on other men's *Leggs*"—which is

some testimony to the ancient nature of that boot and shoe trade which occupies the Midland town largely at the present day. Thence he diverges to discuss the buildings, and the various wonders of the neighbourhood. In the section *Medicinal Waters* we find, for example, Wellingborough-well, "at which Queen Mary lay many weeks. What benefit her Majesty received by the spring here, I know not; this I know, that the spring received benefit from her Majesty." It is easy to picture the worthy man chuckling softly to himself as he painfully transcribed this typical conceit, which I make no doubt he had put down hastily in his notes as the king's troops marched to and fro about Oxford city.

Then he proceeds to deal with the local proverbs. One curious specimen that he quotes is the old saying, "He that must eat a buttered Fagot, let him go to Northampton." We may gather from this, perhaps, that the famous hunting counties were not too well provided with timber in those days. Fuller, it seems, was in favour of afforestation. "Sure I am," he adds later, "that the *clearing* of many *dark places*, where formerly plenty of wood, is all the *new light* this age produced."

You perceive that his progress towards his ostensible subject is not too hasty. He is quite ready to be detained for a few minutes, or longer, by any interesting feature of the roadside. But *The Worthies* themselves are marshalled before us in due time, subdivided into Princes, Saints, Martyrs, Cardinals, Prelates, Statesmen, Capital Judges and Writers on the Law, Writers, Benefactors to the Publick and Memorable Persons. Then we have a list of

Mayors, Sheriffs and minor notabilities of the kind, with short biographies or comments on certain of the more important. And finally a pithy Farewell (generally a pun), which in this case takes the form of a wish that the Nene (or Nine, as he conveniently spells it) were made Ten (that is to say, navigable) from Northampton to Peterborough.

But the writer who incautiously begins to quote from Thomas Fuller finds it difficult to stop. I will conclude with this final characteristic biography, of a contemporary who found admission to the roll of Memorable Persons in a neighbouring county :—

JAMES YORKE a *Blacksmith* of *Lincolne*, and an excellent Workman in his Profession. Insomuch that if *Pegasus* himself would wear *shoes*, this man alone is fit to make them, contriving them so thin and light, as that they would be no burthen to him. But he is a Servant as well of *Apollo* as *Vulcan*, turning his *Stiddy* into a *Study*, having lately set forth a *Book* of *Heraldry* called the *Union of Honour*, containing the *Arms* of the English Nobility, and the Gentry of *Lincolneshire*. And although there be some mistakes (no hand so steady as alwayes to *hit the Nail on the head*) yet is it of singular use and industriously performed ; being set forth Anno 1640.

I have always meant to satisfy my curiosity about this Literary Blacksmith, if his work is procurable at the reading room of the British Museum. But I doubt whether the book is really more than a mere catalogue, interesting any but an accomplished herald. In fact, I suspect the worthy Fuller is here putting in a word for a private friend, all unconsciously

immortalising some industrious artisan who had beguiled half an hour some afternoon on the *Lincolne* road with little bits of erudition on the blazening of arms. JAMES YORKE stands there through the centuries, a fly in amber.

IX

BYWAYS

As a young man I recollect that my elders, when recommending me to read for the Bar—a profession for which I had a curious and inveterate dislike—were wont to counter my objections to lawyers in general by pointing out that when once a barrister had been “called” all sorts of pleasant posts were open to him. Barristers of seven years’ standing—it was difficult to say what they might not be if they chose, and if the gods above were kind. In fact, those who trained their sons or pupils for the Bar were taking, so to speak, a dip in a bran pie. Out of it might come almost anything. Possibilities embraced the slender emoluments of a revising barrister, the wealth, power and patronage of a Lord Chancellor : in between lurked all sorts of minor prizes—County Court judgeships, recorderships, appointments in the Colonies. These possibilities should have appealed to a gambler’s spirit, but my disinclination (or possibly my indolence) prevailed. I got no further towards these various goals than entering at the Inner Temple, eating a sufficiency of dinners at a very early hour in the afternoon, and passing an examination in Roman Law.

It seems to me that the profession of writing, in these days, offers almost as many opportunities of fame and fortune. There are so

many ways (and so many more even in the last few years) by which a man can turn an honest penny by his craft of letters. Over some of them hangs a persistent glamour. Everybody, for instance, would like to write a play. Apart from the lure that the theatre has had from time immemorial, there is more money in a successful play than in any other form of literary effort. And then, it looks so easy. There is so much less actual writing to get through than with a novel. Your novel can scarcely be less than seventy-five thousand words : a play need only be a third of that—or so the experts tell me. Then again, except for the stage directions, it is all a matter of dialogue, and dialogue is proverbially easy to write. Nor need the playwright waste his time and temper trying to explain the amenity of his setting, the personal charm of his characters. He has the scene-painter, the actors and actresses, all anxious to assist him for their own sakes : they are as much concerned as himself to please the gentlemen on the further side of the footlights. And are there not many instances, from Sothorn's Dundreary downwards, of some fortunate hit by one of these gallant fellows turning failure into success ?

Bringing out a book is, no doubt, something of a gamble, but producing a play is, by comparison, as poker to bridge. No better occupation could well be imagined for any young gentleman of spirit.

Our novelists to-day take to play-writing as naturally as ducks to water. Sooner or later, I suppose, they all try their hands at the game—all, that is to say, who have received the smallest encouragement from the novel-buying public.

And, on the whole, a surprisingly large number of them meet with a certain modicum of success. I do not say that every novelist adventurer on the stage makes a fortune, but few of them are absolute failures. And every year some new and unexpected aspirant steps forward calmly and occupies the stage as though at last discovering his true spiritual home.

A century ago it was the young poet rather than the novelist who set out to scale the heights of literary fame by means of the drama. The writing of a poetical play was held by many to be a kind of literary measles—a sort of infantile disease that it was well to get over as early as possible so that it should not interfere too much with the patient's regular work. You could hardly lay claim to the title of poet unless you had written a tragedy. Even Wordsworth began with *The Borderers*, and Coleridge wrote *Remorse* and *The Fall of Robespierre* on his own account, besides spending a great deal of valuable time in translating *Wallenstein* from the German of Schiller. The tradition survived well into the Victorian age. Ardent students still remember the name, at least, of that light of the Colonial Office, Sir Henry Taylor, author of *Isaac Comnenus* and *Philip van Artevelde*. Browning wrote *Strafford*: Alfred Tennyson retorted with *Harold* and *Queen Mary* and half a dozen more. Even Matthew Arnold took the infection, though in a cold and classical spirit. Longfellow wrote a play called *The Spanish Student*: George Eliot another called *The Spanish Gypsy*. Neither possessed, one would say, any very ardent dramatic fire. But, in those days, a play was

the thing to do : for an author of any eminence to neglect the tradition would be a lapse from good manners.

It is worthy of note that those who have made a success—a box-office success—from the playwright's business are unanimously of opinion that the art of the dramatist is one demanding the most arduous training. It is not the smallest use, says the reformed novelist, imagining because you can write a successful story that you can therefore write even a possible play. You must know something of the stage : you must have Experience—without which all your undoubted talent will prove but as sounding brass. I suppose in the old days they were less particular, or perhaps managers took more trouble about revising the work of their distinguished contributors. Garrick, they tell us, cut the *Irene* of Dr. Samuel Johnson so heavily that the lexicographer was seriously annoyed. But he produced it, and ran it for nine nights, and it brought the author in the nice little sum, for those days, of three hundred pounds, one way and another.

I suppose, though a child in such matters, that there may also be a handsome competence to be earned by those who can acquire the art of writing scenarios for the films. Yet this, one may easily believe, is an even more esoteric business than the other. Successful novelists may make money by selling the film rights of their stories, but that is a different matter : it seems that the title and the name of a character or two is all that the directors want : commonly the story, as it appears on the screen, is quite unrecognisable by the author if he ever chances to see it. But to the chronically impecunious

there is a charm about Hollywood and its ways. Everyone in that garden of the gods seems to throw about money as though it were the merest dross; and surely where they spend millions on a single film it should be possible for an intelligent fellow to pick up a few shavings here and there. Now and again I have heard stories of friends who have adventured into this market: much more often my friends bring stories of their own acquaintances who have casually picked up a few thousands in this trade for practically nothing—a mere suggestion—an outline. But these things seem too good to be true. If they occur at all it must be to those favourites of fortune who pick up money wherever they go and whatever branch of activity they attempt—the men who draw winners in the Calcutta Sweep or come down to breakfast and read that cables announcing a rich strike have just been received from the mine whose shares they picked up cheap the day before yesterday. Somehow or other I find it difficult to believe that there is big money waiting for the poverty-stricken writer who is prepared to abandon journalism in the London press and take up scenario-writing for the magnates in Southern California.

Personally, I believe more easily in the stories of those who recommend the writing of advertisements. There is something in this branch of the business, and at present (though the doors are beginning to be thronged by a crowd of competitors) it is not impossible to pick up a fair wage if you have a turn for humorous exaggeration, a nice ear for “slogans,” or a certain fluency in light verse. Some of our

advertising writers, or perhaps I should say our writers of advertisement, contrive to make quite a good thing out of their profession. These big firms which employ their services are generous payers. I confess quite freely that the highest rate of pay ever offered to me for any form of literary work was given by a firm that printed my little essays in the advertisement columns of my morning paper. I would not mind doing many more of those at the same price. But, somehow or other, though I have had my little triumphs of the moment, I have never been able to persuade employers that I was sufficiently serious for their purpose. The good writer of advertisement must manage to have his heart in his job: like the Best Seller among novelists, he is no use if he once begins to write with his tongue in his cheek.

And then, finally, if everything else fails, our unsuccessful journalist or novelist can become an Expert—which means a Specialist. But that is a subject with which I have dealt elsewhere, and alas! it is becoming rapidly a matter of indifference to editors whether their experts can write at all. As with the film magnates, a name is all that is wanted: for the rest, are there not plenty of writers in the office who can be trusted to lick a sentence into decent shape? No! the Expert (that is, the journalistic expert) has fallen upon poor times: it is much now if he is permitted to sit in the office and round the periods of the big man who bears the name, and prints it in large type at the head of the article.

X

DODD'S "PRISON THOUGHTS"

THE celebrated case of Dr. Dodd crops up pretty frequently in the literature of his day. Probably no single trial, unless we except the Dreyfus case, excited more widespread interest and sympathy in its own time. Indeed, the hanging of a clergyman has fortunately been an unusual spectacle in this country. It was not common even in those barbarous days when forgery, sheep-stealing and petty theft were all punishable by the penalty of death. And Dodd had been a popular and celebrated preacher, fifteenth wrangler, prebendary of Brecon and King's chaplain. One would have thought that the Church, which had some power in those days, might have saved her son's neck from the halter.

The "voice of the public" was also raised in vain. "Poor Dodd was put to death yesterday," writes Johnson to Boswell, under date June 28, 1777, "in opposition to the recommendation of the jury—the petition of the City of London—and a subsequent petition signed by three-and-twenty thousand hands. Surely the voice of the public, when it calls so loudly, and only for mercy, ought to be heard." Dr. Johnson himself, to whom Dodd appealed in his extremity, did his best. By his own account he wrote Dodd's "Speech to the

Recorder of London " at the Old Bailey, when sentence of death was about to be pronounced upon him, and " The Convict's Address to his unhappy Brethren," a sermon delivered by the sentenced man in the chapel of Newgate, on the text, " What shall I do to be saved ? " But with the *Thoughts in Prison* the great doctor had, apparently, nothing to do.

I do not suppose many to-day read this poem, unless, like myself, they chance to possess a copy handed down from some pitiful ancestor. As mere poetry it is certainly not worth much, but as a human document it has a certain value. The poem is not a long one : in my edition (Cooke's duodecimo) it occupies only eighty-nine small pages ; and the remainder of the volume is eked out with a few other verses, his speeches at the trial, and the petitions put forward for a reprieve. The whole thing is artificial, but probably less artificial than most of the poetry of an age in which elegance and the classic models were rated at something above their just value. It was the common opinion among his contemporaries that our author had done wonderfully well, considering the unfortunate position he occupied.

Personally I am inclined to think that it is precisely this unfortunate position that raises his verse, now and again, above the level of a mere academic exercise. Real and overpowering emotion will make a poet of your accomplished versifier : without his experience in Newgate Dodd would never have produced a line worth remembering.

William Dodd appears to have been something of a wild youth, of the impulsive and

extravagant order. He began his career as an author early, while still an undergraduate at Cambridge. Clare Hall had the doubtful honour of his education :—

“ And so my college taught, delightful Clare,”

sings the youthful poet. Versification, of the facetious and mock-heroic order, was Dodd's first fancy, as has been the case with other more fortunate graduates of this excellent foundation, but these trifling exercises did not prevent him from taking a creditable degree. In my Cambridge Calendar I can still discover the name Dodd, of Clare, fifteenth in the Mathematical Tripos for 1749–50.

Like most young authors, he gravitated rapidly to London, and promptly married, on a very insufficient income. It seems to have been his habit to take the most momentous steps in haste, repenting subsequently at leisure. However, although Mrs. Dodd was of no very distinguished birth—she was the daughter of a verger at Durham—and though she was fated afterwards to bring him into disgrace, the match seems to have been happy enough, judging by the numerous references to her in the poem. But she does not appear to have been one of those capable economists who can restrain the extravagance of an imaginative husband. Authorship alone was insufficient to provide for the pair, though Dodd published the customary elegy on Frederick, Prince of Wales, wrote a comedy, and a novel called *The Sisters*, which does not seem to have been a work of conspicuous morality. His friends persuaded him that he ought to become or-

dained, and thenceforward for a time his career ran easily.

It was in 1751 that he took orders : in twelve years more he had reached his zenith, being appointed chaplain to the King and to the Bishop of St. David's, who gave him a prebendal stall at Brecon, and also obtained for him the tutorship of Philip Stanhope, afterwards Earl of Chesterfield. In 1766 he received the degree of LL.D. at Cambridge. But in spite of his fame as a popular preacher, and the possession of several good livings, his ambition and extravagance caused him to be perennially in want of money. He invested £2500 belonging to his wife—the proceeds of a legacy and a prize in a lottery—in building a private chapel, known afterwards as the Charlotte Chapel, in Pimlico, but the profits from this source did not come up to his expectations. Then Mrs. Dodd wrote anonymously to Lady Apsley, wife of the Lord Chancellor, offering a bribe if she would secure Dodd's appointment to the living of St. George's, Hanover Square. The letter was traced to her, and the exposure that followed damaged Dodd's reputation beyond repair. His name was promptly struck off the list of royal chaplains : the public press deluged him with satire and abuse ; and, worst of all, Foote introduced his wife into his farce, *The Cozeners*, under the name of Mrs. Simony. At the end of the third week in his *Thoughts* you may observe the doctor trying to get even with the "coward mimic," not perhaps too successfully.

Driven abroad by this affair, Dodd soon fell into serious difficulties. As the chronicler of his life prefixed to my edition rather quaintly puts

it, "his extravagance continued undiminished, and drove him to schemes which overwhelmed him with additional infamy. He descended so low as to become the editor of a newspaper." But even this heroic effort failed to restore his fortunes. He returned to London, and to his preaching, for awhile. On 2nd February 1777 he preached, for the last time as a free man, at the Magdalen House, an institution in which he had always taken great interest. Two days later he committed the forgery that led to his execution.

In the *Gentleman's Magazine* of March 1777, we read :—

"Rev. Dr. Dodd and Mr. Robinson, a broker, were charged before the Lord Mayor, by Henry Fletcher, and Samuel Peach, Esqrs., with forging and uttering, as true, a counterfeit bond, purporting to be the bond of the Earl of Chesterfield, to whom the Doctor is chaplain, for the payment of £4,200 with an intent to defraud."

The prosecutors were, apparently, the two gentlemen who lent the money on the bond. Dodd immediately restored £3500 of the amount, and gave a bill for the remainder ; and for the moment it seemed as if the scandal might be hushed up. But the mayor insisted on going into the case, and he was formally committed for trial.

Up to the last, Dodd seems to have been persuaded that his life would be spared. Rumours circulated after his execution of a private arrangement with the hangman, and extensive preparations "according to the method of Dr. Hunter" to revive the body after it was cut down ; but it was said that the immense crowd

of spectators, by delaying the hearse, destroyed any chance of success that there might have been. But for long afterwards superstitions prevailed in many places that he had escaped. In Germany, even, he was supposed to be wandering in disguise among the Hartz Mountains, for many years to come.

It is curious to read contemporary opinion on the *Thoughts in Prison*. Boswell considered it "an extraordinary effort by a man who was in Newgate for a capital crime." Johnson was not too enthusiastic. He was content to allow that they were "pretty well, if you were previously disposed to like them." The *Gentleman's Magazine*, in its review, opines that "without strong but delusive hopes of pardon, rashly suggested by his too sanguine friends, his mind could never have been sufficiently at ease for such a composition." On the other hand, we have an *obiter dictum* of Johnson's: "Depend upon it, Sir, when a man knows he is going to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates the mind wonderfully."

Here is the introductory note prefixed by the author to his original manuscript:—

April 23, 1777.

I began these Thoughts merely from the impression of my mind, without plan, purpose, or motive, more than the situation and state of my soul. I continued them on a thoughtful and regular plan; and I have been enabled wonderfully—in a state, which in better days I should have supposed would have destroyed all power of reflection—to bring them nearly to a conclusion. I dedicate them to God, and the *reflecting Serious* among my fellow-creatures;

and bless the Almighty to go through them amidst the terrors of this dire place, and the anguish of my disconsolate mind !

The Thinking will easily pardon all inaccuracies, as I am neither *able* nor *willing* to read over these melancholy lines with a *serious* and *critical* eye ! They are imperfect, but the language of the heart ; and, had I time and inclination, might and should be improved.

But—

W. D.

The first week of the *Thoughts in Prison* is dated as "commenced Sunday evening, eight o'clock, Feb. 23, 1777" : the fifth, and last, week concludes abruptly, and bears no date ; while the execution itself took place on June 27. Consequently he had no more than four calendar months in which to write and polish his verses, even if he had cared about bringing them to that unnatural degree of neatness that the age demanded. Probably the file would not have improved them. Briefly, the poem may be described as a series of five sermons in blank verse. The Imprisonment—The Retrospect—Public Punishment—The Trial—Futurity—these are the headings of the several divisions. They do not make lively writing, but they have at least one merit not too common in the works of our condemned criminals—they are free from complaints as to the injustice of his punishment. He had offended against the law, knowing the penalty it awarded, and he did not seek to palliate his offence.

The condition of prisons, however, and the state of the penal law at that time did seem to call for reform, and it would perhaps have been strange had he failed to touch upon these

subjects. Mr. Hanway, the philanthropic inventor of the umbrella and stout opponent of tea-drinking, had recently published his pamphlet on *Solitude in Imprisonment*: he had also been largely instrumental in founding that Magdalen Hospital at which Dodd had preached the inaugural sermon; and the doctor, who had made trial of the system followed at Newgate, took occasion to put in a few warm words on behalf of his old colleague. You shall find them in the third section—on Public Punishment:—

Hail, gracious Hanway! To thy noble plan,
Sage sympathetic, let the muse subscribe,
Rejoicing——

To the educated prisoner, at all events, nothing was less desirable than association with his fellow-convicts. Later on, he is stronger still in favour of that solitary confinement which we are now apt to regard as the height of inhumanity:—

Thy blest effects
Already on my mind's delighted eye
Open beneficent. E'en now I view
The revel-rout dispersed; each to his cell
Admitted, silent! The obstreperous cries
Worse than infernal yells; the clank of chains—
Opprobrious chains, to man severe disgrace,
Hushed in calm order, vex the ears no more!
While in their stead, reflection's deep-drawn sighs,
And prayers of humble penitence are heard.

Whatever were the drawbacks of the silent system, it is clear that to some it marked an

advance, an improvement upon the pandemonium of old Newgate.

Against the Draconian severity of the penal code then in force he had, at least, an equally strong case. Says the account published after his execution by the Ordinary of Newgate: "He had sometimes expressed his thoughts about our penal laws, that they were too sanguinary—that they were against not only the laws of God, but of nature"; and the same very just sentiment is expressed with sufficient eloquence in "Week the Fourth—The Trial":—

Hoary grown
And sanctify'd by custom's habit grey,
Absurdity stalks forth, still more absurd,
And double shame reflects upon an age
Wise and enlighten'd. Should not equal laws
Their punishments proportionate to crimes;
Nor, all Draconic, ev'n to blood pursue
Vindictive, where the venial poor offence
Cries loud for mercy?

I admit that these passages are rather sound sense than inspired poetry. In fact, the *Thoughts in Prison* must be reckoned fairly good didactic verse, rising occasionally, but very rarely, into passages of a certain eloquence. I do not know that it is very much worse than the better known work of Edward Young, who predeceased his disciple by about a dozen years. There is more flat prose but less bombastic nonsense in Dodd than in the author of *Night Thoughts*. In the characters of the two men you may find a certain similarity. Young may have been less extravagant, but he had perhaps an even greater thirst for money and the sunshine of noble patrons. Both men had, or

affected to have, a strong feeling for religion, but in the midst of all Young's piety there breathes a spirit of querulous discontent which irritates the modern reader. Dodd, at any rate, had some cause for melancholy. But what the author of *Night Thoughts* might have accomplished had he lain four months in Newgate, a condemned felon, must always remain a matter of conjecture.

XI

THE POET OF DEMOCRACY

IT is good for the critic, employing himself in the congenial exercise of estimating the reputations of great authors with the footrule of his preconceived opinions, to come up suddenly against a writer to whom none of the customary methods of measurement can be applied. That is to say, it should be good for the critic, if he knows how to take the blow properly—if he has the courage to disregard the old canons for the moment and to recognise that in certain cases culture, a sense of style, and other purely literary qualities may become matters so unimportant as hardly to be worth mentioning. No doubt it is an article of faith with most of us that the thought is the chief thing, the manner of expression of less vital moment; but for all that, when we come to criticise a passage, it is commonly rather the style than the matter to which we pay attention. The literary graces, the subtle turns of phrase, the delicate and scholarly allusions—it is undeniable that these add enormously to our intellectual enjoyment of an author's work. We are accustomed to regard some attempt to provide these as our legal due from all who presume to write books. And when we approach Walt Whitman for the first time and find not only poetry without metre and without rhyme, but

a medley of strange words—French, Spanish, Italian, American slang, some apparently coined by the author on the spur of the moment with no very clear idea of their etymology—when we behold the astonishing outspokenness of the man on subjects that are not generally selected as themes for poetry—and when, every now and then, like a douche of cold water, some astoundingly ludicrous image bursts upon us in the middle of a passage that we were just beginning to admire, it is not surprising that we should lose our temper for the moment and say hard things of a writer who does not appear to have learned even the rudiments of his art.

When we read *Leaves of Grass* for the first time it probably strikes us as intolerable rant, unredeemed by any graces of expression and containing (as if by accident) one or two fine passages. It must be read two or three times before we begin to realise that there are more fine passages in the book, and less rant, than we had supposed. When we have studied it carefully, it may dawn upon us at last that this is no case for the literary critic at all. Whitman must be met on the common ground of our humanity. If, with Robert Louis Stevenson, we choose to picture him as a large, shaggy dog—"just unchained, scouring the beaches of the world and baying at the moon"—we may secure an apt phrase, but go grievously wrong in our estimate of the man's work. Rather let us call him a natural man, unashamed of his own attributes and appetites, who strove with remarkable success to divest poetry of its "feudal" tone and multitudinous ornamental accretions, using it instead as a vehicle for preaching with direct simplicity an ideal

democracy founded upon universal brotherly love.

This is one aspect of Whitman's work, but it is by no means everything. He was not one of those men who sit down with a definite purpose and concentrate themselves upon the effort to carry it to a logical conclusion. His books, whether in prose or verse (and there is often little difference between the form of the two), are one long series of hints and partial explanations, not generally satisfactory to the anxious reader. Whitman was always trying to explain himself, but his genius did not lie in the direction of lucidity, and towards the end of his life he grew to regard himself as an enigma, and left the business of finding a solution in the more capable hands of his admirers. To Dr. Richard Maurice Bucke, afterwards one of his literary executors, he surrendered, with a child-like faith, his explanatory prerogative. In 1883 this gentleman published an authorised biography of the poet, and thenceforward Whitman accepted him as his official "expresser and explanator." But the poet himself had tried his hand several times at indicating his object to a careless world. His attempts generally came to a confession of incapacity, as when he wrote of *Good-bye my Fancy* that "it will have to be ciphered and ciphered out long—and is probably in some respects the most curious part of its author's baffling works." He may have made it clear, in places, that democracy needed a new poet.

There is a passage in the *Song of the Exposition* — probably one of the best-known passages in the whole of *Leaves of Grass* — in which the poet summons the Muse to her

new home from the old and narrow domains of the past. It is an eminently characteristic passage, containing as it does one real gem of pure and dignified eloquence—a veritable oasis for the much-enduring literary critic—sandwiched between two of the wettest of wet blankets. Here is the exordium, not couched in particularly poetical language :—

Come, Muse, migrate from Greece and Ionia,
 Cross out please those immensely overpaid
 accounts,
 That matter of Troy and Achilles' wrath and
 Æneas', Odysseus' wanderings,
 Placard "Removed" and "To Let" on the rocks
 of your snowy Parnassus,
 Repeat at Jerusalem, place the notice high on
 Jaffa's gate and on Mount Moriah,
 The same on the walls of your German, French and
 Spanish castles, and Italian collections,
 For know a better, fresher, busier sphere, a wide,
 untried domain awaits, demands you.

This reads like a plain, business statement, marred by one or two rhetorical phrases and, to the surprise of the student, containing one perfect hexameter line—the fourth in the quotation. Is this entirely an accident? It seems improbable, for we find another a little further on. Yet this sort of artifice is surely foreign to the nature of the man. Perhaps it is unconscious reminiscence. The second example is in the first line of my next quotation :—

Ended, deceas'd through time, her voice by
 Castaly's fountain,
 Silent the broken-lipp'd Sphynx in Egypt, silent
 all those century-baffling tombs,

Ended for aye the epics of Asia's, Europe's helmeted
 warriors, ended the primitive call of the
 Muses,
 Calliope's call forever closed, Clio, Melpomene,
 Thalia dead,
 Ended the stately rhythmus of Una and Oriana,
 ended the quest of the holy Graal,
 Jerusalem a handful of ashes blown by the wind,
 extinct,
 The Crusaders' streams of shadowy midnight
 troops sped with the sunrise,
 Amadis, Tancred, utterly gone, Charlemagne,
 Roland, Oliver gone,
 Palmerin, ogre, departed, vanish'd the turrets that
 Usk from its waters reflected,
 Arthur vanish'd with all his knights, Merlin and
 Lancelot and Galahad, all gone, dissolv'd
 utterly like an exhalation ;
 Pass'd ! pass'd ! for us, forever pass'd, that once
 so mighty world, now void, inanimate, phan-
 tom world,
 Embroider'd, dazzling, foreign world, with all its
 gorgeous legends, myths,
 Its kings and castles proud, its priests and warlike
 lords and courtly dames,
 Pass'd to its charnel vault, coffin'd with crown and
 armor on,
 Blazon'd with Shakspeare's purple page,
 And dirged by Tennyson's sweet sad rhyme.

This passage is one of the few in Walt Whit-
 man that attract at first sight, and compel even
 the unsympathetic reader to acknowledge in
 the man some true poetical feeling. With the
 exception of his usual tendency to catalogue,
 not quite so much in evidence here as in some
 passages, the excerpt is grave, dignified, elo-
 quent, musical. "If only the man would
 always write like that !" murmurs the half-

convinced critic. But the poet had only been swept away for a moment by a flood of past literary memories. At the next line he regains his American and democratic feet :—

I say I see, my friends, if you do not, the illustrious
 emigré (having it is true in her day, although
 the same, chang'd, journey'd considerable),
 Making directly for this rendezvous, vigorously
 clearing a path for herself, striding through
 the confusion,
 By thud of machinery and shrill steam-whistle
 undismay'd,
 Bluff'd not a bit by drain-pipe, gasometers, arti-
 ficial fertilizers,
 Smiling and pleas'd with palpable intent to stay,
 She's here, install'd amid the kitchen ware !

Is it not almost sacrilege, the juxtaposition of two such passages ? And yet, on reflection, must there not be something great in a poet who can dare so ludicrous a sequence to emphasise what he has to say ? Or rather, who could write the latter passage without perceiving any fundamental incongruity with the preceding portion. Democracy had to be recognised as a great living force ; and to this end it must found its own forms of art, letters and theology, displacing all that were “ feudal ” and obsolete. A great original literature—this was to become the justification and reliance of American democracy. To this subject he returns again and again. He was not altogether unappreciative of the work of other American writers, but he could discern in them nothing but echoes, nothing national. The States expanded : Texas, California, Alaska were annexed : the body grew more and more vast, wealthy,

powerful; but it seemed as though it were without a soul.

A thoroughly faithful transcript of any man's personality, were such a transcript anyway procurable, would be one of the most valuable of all books. Walt Whitman came nearer to giving us this, perhaps, than any other writer in the world's history. He set out with the ambition of exploiting his own personality in the most candid and comprehensive sense. "Given the nineteenth century with the United States and what they furnish as areas and points of view," his book sought to be a simple and faithful record of the author's "identity, ardors, observations, faiths and thoughts, coloured hardly at all with any colouring from other faiths, other authors, other identities, or times." He meant to sing, to omit passages or to insert, solely with reference to America and himself and that present day. He not only meant to write, but he maintained that he had written, poems that could not possibly have emerged from any other era, nor from any other land. And more than this was necessary to their conception—his own home life and upbringing, his hospital experiences in the war, and even the ultimate triumph of the Northern Union. This is, after all, no more than might be predicated of most poems of any merit. But to Whitman it seemed as though a poetry with cosmic features (he phrases it so in several places) had never been possible before. America, that vast congeries of some "thirty-eight or forty empires soldered in one," necessitated for her poetry also entirely new standards of measurement.

Walt Whitman (his name was originally

Walter, like his father, and the copyright of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* was registered in that name) was born on May 31, 1819, at West Hills, Long Island, the second of a family of nine children, of whom seven were boys. On the mother's side he was descended from the Van Velsors, a family of farmers of Dutch descent. He himself made much of the feminine side of his ancestry, and I have no doubt that a good deal of the Holland element persisted both in his personality and his writings. His magnificent physique he derived equally from both parents. After his fifty-fourth year, when he had been broken down by too long a course of hospital nursing among the wounded, he was only a shadow of his former self, but in the old days his fine appearance used to attract great attention. He stood quite six feet in height, with the "frame of a gladiator, a flowing grey beard mingled with the hairs on his broad, slightly-bared chest." He walked with a naturally majestic stride—"a massive model of ease and independence." In short, he looked the part of the Poet of Democracy, the Man, free and unfettered by the trammels of a decayed civilisation. But for the Dutch element in his ancestry he might not have shown this so freely.

Long Island, or Paumanok as he preferred to call it from the old Indian name, was another main factor in the formation of Whitman's character. It is a peculiar and picturesque region, over a hundred miles long, "shaped like a fish, plenty of sea-shore, the horizon boundless, the air fresh and healthy, the numerous bays and creeks swarming with aquatic birds," and so forth. When the poet

was still a child his parents moved to Brooklyn, but for many years after he used to pay long and frequent visits to his birthplace and wander over all the neighbouring country. When about fourteen years old he left school for a printing office. About three years later he began to write. At nineteen or twenty he was publishing and editing the *Long Islander*, a weekly newspaper at Huntington. Then he came to New York to live, and during the next twelve years seems to have been employed chiefly in printing offices as a compositor, and occasionally as a contributor to newspapers and magazines.

These years gave him his education—that education from which his poems were to spring—"perhaps the most comprehensive equipment ever attained by a human being, though many things that the schools prescribe were left out." Whitman speaks of himself during those years in Brooklyn and New York from 1838 to 1853 as "absorbing a million people with an intimacy, an eagerness, an abandon, probably never equalled—land and water." It was his habit to go on equal terms with every one, and he became thoroughly acquainted with the shops, houses, ferries, factories, taverns, and all that they contained. Quite probably this was the happiest time of his life. He found pleasure in everything: he "wandered, amazed at his own lightness and glee." One of his special enjoyments was to go up and down Broadway in an omnibus, sitting in front and studying the crowds and the traffic, or crossing the East River in the ferry-boats, watching the sights and sounds of the river. At that time reading did not play a great part

in his education. He professed himself preferring to study direct from the life rather than from the impressions of others. But his great aim was to absorb humanity and modern life, and if books would help him towards that end he would not entirely neglect them.

No man ever took so much pains to acquaint the reader with every particular of his own development as did Whitman. Again and again, in his prose jottings—in *Specimen Days* and elsewhere—he reverts to the congenial subject of the preparation of his own poetic field, the ploughing, planting and seeding of the ground. Already, he says, in his sixteenth year he had obtained possession of a stout volume of some thousand pages, containing the whole of Walter Scott's poetry, and this remained for many years an "inexhaustible mine and treasury of poetic study (especially the endless forests and jungles of notes)." Sir Walter's metrical romances may seem curious pabulum for the iconoclast who was to relegate all the trappings of chivalry to the dust-heap, but so it was. And these were some of his other books, as he describes them :—

Later, at intervals, I used to go off, sometimes for a week at a stretch, down in the country or to Long Island's seashores—there, in the presence of outdoor influences, I went over thoroughly the Old and New Testaments, and absorbed (probably to better advantage for me than in any library or indoor room—it makes such difference *where* you read), Shakspere, Ossian, the best versions I could get of Homer, Eschylus, Sophocles, the old German Nibelungen, the ancient Hindoo poems, and one or two other masterpieces, Dante's among them. As it happened, I read the latter mostly in an old wood.

The *Iliad* (Buckley's prose version) I read first thoroughly on the peninsula of Orient, north-east end of Long Island, in a sheltered hollow of rocks and sand, with the sea on each side. I have wondered since why I was not overwhelmed by those mighty masters. Likely because I read them, as described, in the full presence of nature, under the sun, with the far-spreading landscape and vistas, or the sea rolling in.

And perhaps in part, we might add, to that admirable Dutch element in his composition.

It is interesting to note that Whitman was no admirer of the poems of Edgar Allan Poe, though he professed himself a subscriber to the doctrine that, in modern times at any rate, there can be no such thing as a long poem. His own *Song of Myself*, it may be mentioned in passing, occupies some forty octavo pages of fairly small print. But then consider the difficulty of condensing such a subject! He used to make at that time enormous scrap-books, into which he pasted favourite passages, most of them underlined in places and copiously annotated. It must be confessed that his method of treating books was not exactly that of the bibliophile. "I get some old edition," he writes, "of no pecuniary value, and then take portions in my pocket. In this way I have dislocated the principal American writers of my time—Emerson, Longfellow, Whittier and the rest—with translations of the French Madame Dudevant (always good to me), the German metaphysician Hegel, and nearly all the current foreign poets." The *Arabian Nights*, again, he had known from boyhood. The novels of George Sand, as well as of Scott, were among his favourites. Rousseau's *Confessions*

and the *Sayings* of Epictetus were in his possession. And at the beginning of the war he came upon Felton's *Ancient and Modern Greece*, which he read so many times that he came at length almost to know it by heart. It is not a bad list of authors, and there were many others not specified here with whom he had something more than a superficial acquaintance.

Not books alone, but "certain actors and singers" had a good deal to do with the business of preparing the poetic field. In *Specimen Days* Whitman again recounts how he frequented, while in New York, the old Park, the Bowery, Broadway and Chatham-square theatres, and the Italian operas at Chambers Street, Astor Place or the Battery. For many seasons, owing to his connection with the papers, he was on the free list. The theatrical passion preceded the musical. In the drama he saw, among others, the younger Kean, Macready, Sheridan Knowles in his own *Virginius*, Fanny Kemble as Lady Townley in *The Provoked Husband*, as Bianca in *Fazio* and as Marianna in *The Wife* :—

Nothing finer did ever stage exhibit—the veterans of all nations said so, and my boyish heart and head felt it in every minute cell. The lady was just matured, strong, better than merely beautiful, born from the footlights, had had three years' practice in London and through the British towns, and then she came to give America that young maturity and roseate power in all their noon, or rather forenoon, flush. It was my good luck to see her nearly every night she play'd at the old Park—certainly in all her principal characters.

And in opera he was scarcely less fortunate.

He heard all the Italian and other operas then in vogue, and well rendered. He heard Marietta Alboni every time she sang in New York or the vicinity—also Grisi, Mario and the “baritone Badiali, the finest in the world.” It was at Castle Garden, Battery, that he heard Jenny Lind.

And so, his education having gone this length, he began putting *Leaves of Grass* through the press, at the job printing office of the brothers Rome, in Brooklyn. There had been many corrections, rewritings, alterations. “I had great trouble in leaving out the stock ‘poetical’ touches, but succeeded at last.” His father had just died. The five or six previous years had been spent in travel and various occupations: he had been on a leisurely working expedition “through all the middle States and down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. Lived awhile in New Orleans, and work’d there on the editorial staff of *Daily Crescent* newspaper.” He was at that job for a year, after which he plodded back northwards, by slow degrees, up the Mississippi and by way of the Great Lakes. On his return he took up house building for a time, but dropped it as soon as he found himself making money, and devoted himself to the brothers Rome and the first printing of his work.

Leaves of Grass was but a thin volume when it first appeared—a small quarto of ninety-four pages, containing twelve poems. It was a gradual growth, and to the end of his life Whitman was always adding to and enlarging it. The title, as it stands now, includes all his published poetical works. Fresh material was absorbed from time to time. In his own phrase, since its first edition the book “has had some

eight hitches or growths," and two "annexes" were added to these before he died. Now the volume contains more than 400 pages. The poems aroused no storm of feeling, one way or the other, but it is untrue to say that they were entirely ignored. Several copies were sent to eminent men of letters—one to Emerson—and a letter from him to the poet, in which he characterised the book as "the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed," found its way into the New York *Tribune*, and created the first real demand for the work. A second edition appeared in 1856, and a third, with much new matter, four years later.

Early in 1862 news was brought that his brother George, a rising officer in the 51st New York Volunteers, had been wounded at Fredericksburg, and Whitman started for the army camp on the Rappahannock. His brother was out of danger when he arrived, but the field of battle had a strange attraction for the poet; and as something in his Quaker antecedents forbade him to fight he engaged as a volunteer in the hospital service. He remained in this until the end of the war, voluntarily sacrificing his healthy constitution in the cause. The letters to his mother, reprinted in *The Wound-Dresser*, give a vivid picture of the work he unflinchingly set himself to do. *Drum - Taps* (subsequently incorporated in *Leaves of Grass*) is full of the details of his ministry.

Indeed, the poet seemed to possess an exhaustless fund of personal magnetism. His mere presence in the wards cheered and invigorated the patients. He was connected with

no society, but went on his own individual account, as a sort of self-appointed missionary; and after a time benefactors known and unknown provided him with considerable sums of money for distribution in various forms. "When Whitman appeared, in passing along," wrote an eye-witness in the *New York Herald* some years later, "there was a smile of affection and welcome on every face, however wan. . . . From cot to cot they called him, often in tremulous tones or in whispers; they embraced him, they touched his hand, they gazed at him. To one he gave a few words of cheer, for another he wrote a letter home, to others he gave an orange, a few comfits, a cigar, a pipe and tobacco, a sheet of paper, or a postage stamp, all of which, and many other things, were in his capacious haversack." And in one of his own letters home he explains that his habit, when practicable, was to prepare and fortify himself for one of these tours by previous rest, a bath, clean clothes, a good meal, and as cheerful an appearance as possible. He fully realised that the most precious gift that he brought to the wounded was that of his own invigorating personality.

From these hospital experiences Whitman learned much that was of infinite value to himself. They extended his already wide knowledge of life: they gave him a measureless sympathy with all forms of suffering; and they deepened his faith in the heroism and fortitude of the race. Democracy had proved itself capable of patriotism, of making great sacrifices for an ideal purpose. But, while his spiritual side had gained, his physical vitality had suffered a serious shock, from which indeed

it never entirely recovered. As early as 1864 the constant emotional strain began to tell upon him; and the year after he had an attack of malaria and blood-poisoning—the first illness he had ever known. In 1870 came a stroke of paralysis, and from that time forward he suffered continually from recurring spells of illness. He removed, in 1873, to Camden, New Jersey, where he resided until his death, on the 27th of March 1892. He went to Camden to die, but whenever he was able to do so he still lived out of doors in the open country, “bathed in the sunshine, lived with the birds and squirrels, and played in the water with the fishes.” Many of his later poems, from *Sands at Seventy* or *Good-bye my Fancy*, give evidence of a happy serenity against which illness and neglect were alike powerless.

Thanks in old age—thanks ere I go,
 For health, the midday sun, the impalpable air—
 for life, mere life,
 For precious ever-lingering memories (of you, my
 mother dear—you, father—you, brothers,
 sisters, friends),
 For all my days—not those of peace alone—the
 days of war the same,
 For gentle words, caresses, gifts from foreign lands,
 For shelter, wine and meat—for sweet apprecia-
 tion,
 (You distant, dim unknown—or young or old—
 countless, unspecified, readers belov'd,
 We never met, and ne'er shall meet—and yet our
 souls embrace, long, close and long);

Or again this passage :—

After surmounting three-score and ten,
 With all their chances, changes, losses, sorrows,

My parents' deaths, the vagaries of my life, the
 many tearing passions of me, the war of '63
 and '4,

As some old broken soldier, after a long, hot,
 wearying march, or haply after battle,

To-day at twilight, hobbling, answering company
 roll-call, here, with vital voice,

Reporting yet, saluting yet the Officer over all.

Certainly Whitman had to wait some time for recognition, in his own country, from any but a few faithful adherents. There was a time, just after his retirement in 1873, when he lay at Camden sick, lonely and, as it seemed, forgotten by the world. It was from England that he first received sympathy and assistance, as it was in England that *Leaves of Grass* had first attained to anything like a circulation. Visitors came to him, Edmund Yates among the earliest, a "rather queer old fellow named Ingram . . . has been a great traveller, is English by birth." In 1876 more practical help came. A letter had been sent to the English press by Robert Buchanan, much to the annoyance of several American papers, which secured an immediate increase in the number of sales of *Leaves of Grass* and brought the poet many new disciples. John Addington Symonds wrote to him frequently, with all the ardour of a convert. Tennyson corresponded with him. Swinburne wrote his poem "To Walt Whitman in America." Ernest Rhys and Roden Noel, among others, became his champions on this side of the Atlantic. William Rossetti was one of the first—if not the very first—to secure a copy of the poems, when in 1865 some copies were sold by a book pedlar in Sunderland, and

he also did his best, both in speech and print, to give the democratic poet a helping hand.

But in America itself the press never became enthusiastic during his life-time. He had admirers, besides Emerson. John Burroughs wrote warmly of the man and his work. Thoreau, Alcott, Bryant were among his friends in the New York days. Afterwards Joaquin Miller, J. C. Harris, Mark Twain, Bret Harte and the rest of the Western writers came to regard him as their leader. But the American magazines never displayed the least anxiety to secure his poetry. One of several "personal notes" on this subject can be read in *Good-bye my Fancy* :—

All along, from 1860 to '91, many of the pieces in L. of G., and its annexes, were first sent to publishers or magazine editors before being printed in the L., and were peremptorily rejected by them and sent back to their author. The "Eidolons" was sent back by Dr. H., of *Scribner's Monthly*, with a lengthy, very insulting, and contemptuous letter. "To the Sun-Set Breeze" was rejected by the editor of *Harper's Monthly* as being "an improvisation" only. "On, on, ye Jocund Twain" was rejected by the *Century* editor as being personal merely. Several of the pieces went the rounds of all the monthlies, to be thus summarily rejected.

June, '90. The —— rejects and sends back my little poem, so I am now set out in the cold by every big magazine and publisher, and may as well understand and admit it—which is just as well, for I feel I am palpably losing my sight and ratiocination.

Neither in prose nor in verse did Whitman ever succeed in getting the attention of the general public. Yet the personal note and per-

petual shrewd touches of observation to be found in *Specimen Days* and occasionally elsewhere are thoroughly delightful. So far as writing is concerned, he was always at his best when he had no thesis to propound, no laboured explanation to make. He was as keen an observer of the sights and sounds of open-air life as Thoreau, and he brought to the study of natural phenomena a more original and less academic mind. He was always satisfied to record his impressions briefly and without regard to any of the accepted conventions of the professional author. In the longer and more serious essays (called *Democratic Vistas* in the English edition) the writer suffers sadly—and the reader even more sadly—from lack of lucidity. It seems as though Whitman were for ever saying, in verse and prose alike, “It is time to explain myself”—and failing egregiously to do so. We need not quarrel with him for such trifles as split infinitives or strangely unwarrantable locutions, but the reader may justifiably deplore that lack of literary workmanship which converts many of his sentences into mere inextricable jungles of words. Parentheses are piled on parentheses, in a vain effort to strike the key-note of the matter, and additional explanations (making confusion worse confounded) straggle in footnotes at the bottom of the page. Whitman was constitutionally incapable of omitting anything that he saw—which is perhaps why so many catalogues disfigure his poems. In writing it was at once his chief merit and his chief fault that he had no fixed scheme, no theory of procedure.

“Walt, you contain enough, why don’t you let it out then?” is his battle-cry in the *Song of*

Myself. Method was nothing to him. Personality was everything.

In his poetry this lack of method is not so important a matter. We are not to regard his work in the light of a literary performance, and the structure of his verse, loose and irregular as it was, had at all events the effect of keeping the numerous parenthetical additions under some sort of control. *Leaves of Grass* was meant for the expression of his own personality—an honest attempt to put an authentic human being freely, fully and truly on record in the pages of a printed book. And, together with this, he was the celebrator of the Average Man :—

I swear I begin to see the meaning of these things,
It is not the earth, it is not America who is so
great,
It is I who am great or to be great, it is You up
there, or any one.

And, finally, he was the harbinger of a new and national literature, democratic and American :—

Rhymes and rhymers pass away, poems distill'd
from poems pass away,
The swarms of reflectors and the polite pass, and
leave ashes,
Admirers, importers, obedient persons, make but
the soil of literature,
America justifies itself, give it time, no disguise
can deceive it or conceal from it, it is impassive enough,
Only toward the likes of itself will it advance to
meet them,
If its poets appear it will in due time advance to
meet them, there is no fear of mistake.

(The proof of a poet shall be sternly deferr'd till
his country absorbs him as affectionately as
he has absorb'd it.)

“The trick of literary style,” said Whitman on one occasion, “I almost wonder if it is not chiefly having no style at all.” This happens to be one of those gnomes, not uncommonly voiced by writers who have found the customary conventions tiresome, which contain a kernel of truth but are very apt to mislead the admirer. It is true enough that a conscious mannerism is the worst of all styles. It is a sham and a pretence, and can never have any real value in the eyes of thinking men. But, in its true sense, literary style is not a trick at all. The best style of writing is simply the best way of expressing a given thought in language harmonious, dignified, clear and easily comprehensible. Whitman himself was not insensible to the harmony of words. He could write passages of sustained eloquence and dignity; but now and again his theories would be his undoing. In his anxiety to strip his Muse bare of any classical adornment he would take a sudden drop into the language of the stump orator, or employ colloquialisms that make the judicious reader shiver and gasp as from an unexpected douche of icy water. It was Whitman’s mode of showing his contempt of the smooth and sugary poetry furnished by the ordinary craftsman; and the effect is that the critic who is anxious to admire Whitman’s undoubted genius finds many difficulties in his path. He is perpetually being offended, not only by isolated words and expressions, but by that absolute lack of restraint which so often

makes the poet carry on a metaphor or an illustration beyond the verge of absurdity. It was just that Dutch ancestry, on the mother's side ; that curious lack of acuteness in sensing the ridiculous :—

I find I incorporate gneiss, coal, long-threaded
moss, fruits, grains, esculent roots,
And am stucco'd with quadrupeds and birds all
over

—a passage that irresistibly conveys the impression of a Walt Whitman in Palissy ware. Or again, when he sings :—

Earth ! you seem to look for something at my
hands,
Say, old top-knot, what do you want ?

we are inclined, at a first reading, to rub our eyes in blank astonishment. Indeed, the reader is often at a loss, like the poet's friend, Peter Doyle, to make out " what he was getting at." In his passion for identifying himself with the universe he could not stop to consider the comic effect of a passage.

Retreating, triumphantly twittering, the king-
bird, from piercing the crow with its bill, for
amusement—and I triumphantly twittering,

he writes. Or take *A Song of Occupations*, with its never-ending catalogue of trades, or the humorous particularity of the lobster-catching in *A Song of Joys* :—

I pull the wicker-pots up slantingly, the dark
green lobsters are desperate with their claws
as I take them out, I insert wooden pegs in
the joints of their pincers,

I go to all the places one after another, and then
 row back to the shore,
 There in a huge kettle of boiling water the lobsters
 shall be boil'd till their colour becomes scarlet.

Touches of this sort have undeniably their humorous side. You read them the first time and laugh : on a second perusal of the book, meeting them once more, perhaps you smile : a third time, and behold ! you have almost persuaded yourself that these trifling blots are essential to the composite personality of a poet whom you have begun to admire and to love. You would not have them away : at the least they serve as a foil for those other passages where he forgets his formula, and soars untrammelled to the heights.

Smile O voluptuous cool-breath'd earth !
 Earth of the slumbering and liquid trees !
 Earth of departed sunset—earth of the mountains
 misty-topt !
 Earth of the vitreous pour of the full moon just
 tinged with blue !
 Earth of shine and dark mottling the tide of the
 river !
 Earth of the limpid gray of clouds brighter and
 clearer for my sake !
 Far-swooping elbow'd earth—rich apple-blossom'd
 earth !
 Smile, for your lover comes.

Passages like this seem to detach themselves from the text after a time and come upon us suddenly in a sort of surprise. It is possible we should not think so highly of them if it were not for all that we had been compelled to wade through before we found them. They are gems, but nothing much out of the common.

Still, search diligently, and you shall find some of better value. Walt Whitman grows upon the student. To read his poetry is to embark upon a voyage of discovery, whereon you may find rare treasure. The most pedantic-minded of critics may find conversion there, provided he does not throw the volume into a corner at the first reading, and refuse to pick it up again. I daresay Stevenson himself might have taken up a different attitude—have pictured him possibly as a slightly less shaggy dog—had he but persevered.

XII

OF ACTORS AND ACTING

I SUPPOSE there are very few of us who have never in our lives felt the secret fascination of the theatre. This business of representation, given the chance, we could all manage : we are certain of that in our hearts : we have only to look at the stage to be assured that we could at all events be no worse than these others. Which, I suppose, is the fount and origin of all our dramatic clubs and societies. The desire to personate others may be merely a desire to get out of the personality that dominates oneself. We possess, perhaps, a score of subliminal selves unjustly held down and suppressed by the one tyrannous fellow whom we are accustomed to recognise ; and how pleasant it would be to let them out, so to speak, in the open and give them a little healthy exercise ! When we do this in real life we go in danger of a medical certificate and enforced seclusion in a “ nursing home.” On the stage we are so much the safer. We can become Hamlet or Romeo, Lady Macbeth or Paula Tanqueray without fear of any unpleasant consequences more lasting than a few expressions of amused scorn from critics in stalls or gallery. I daresay the attempt to present these parts may even do us good.

Long ago I remember writing an essay to prove that few actors were altogether without a

latent nobility of character. The spirit that prompts a man or woman to undertake a noble part is itself akin to magnanimity. And I went on to note that few actors, accustomed to personate with any success the great characters of the drama, have themselves been found entirely wanting in the finer feelings of humanity. They may have been touched with avarice, like Garrick, or, conversely, with a fine disregard for money, which is perhaps a commoner failing, or with too large an appreciation of drink or with hearts too susceptible for their own domestic happiness; but not many good actors have been thoroughly and irreclaimably vicious. This, you may urge, is not very much to say, and perhaps I am naturally prone to understatement. Let me point, then, to the lives of Burbage, Betterton, Macready, the Irvings—or to what we know of them! Some of our comedians, too, have been pleasant fellows to know in private life. They commonly have an air with them: they have learned how to live. I like to think of the magnificent Elliston, selling books in Leamington as though he were playing the part of a shopkeeper on the stage. When you come to think of it, these light drawing-room comedians must be delightful men to have about the house. They have practised the art of being agreeable so long and so often that it comes to them almost of necessity. The low comedian, of course, is in rather a different category, but in other circles (where, for example, there is a fondness for practical jokes) I can imagine no more popular companion.

It is a question how far the representation of heroes serves to inculcate the heroic spirit.

We speak loosely of an actor "getting into the skin" of his part, becoming as it were for the moment Othello or Iago, without considering too closely how this experience is going to affect his after life when he reverts to his status as a common or domestic Englishman. To a certain extent I do believe in the advantages of playing the *rôle* of a hero. I am only rather doubtful whether taking the part of a villain may not have a detrimental influence. Broadly speaking, if you are an actor at all you cannot take the part of an ancient Roman without, for a time, thinking the thoughts proper to his kind. It must be admirable practice. But then, in order to act Iago, you have clearly to become a smiling villain, full of envious and evil thoughts, and this cannot well be good for anyone. A difficult subject—perhaps only to be solved by employing for our villains actors of a smaller calibre who can be trusted not to take their parts too seriously. It is clear, at any rate, that no one should be suffered to play nothing but villains. It cannot be fair on anyone—even the most casual of his casual tribe. Sooner or later, one imagines, the poison must enter into his soul. I should rather like an enquiry to be opened as to the careers and ultimate fate of men who have been employed in this capacity for any length of time.

From what I have said above you will readily gather that I am all in favour of theatricals as a part of school life. They should, I think, be much more freely utilised than they are: instead of being relegated to the end of term (or at best to some chance performance half-way through) and regarded more as a holiday treat

than as a serious part of training they should be a regular and important part of the curriculum. I see no reason why every house in a big school, for example, should not give a performance every week, not necessarily of a different play, though it should be changed now and then—let us say once every three weeks or so. And the cast should certainly be changed every week, so as to give every one a chance. You do not want, at an ordinary English public school, to train pupils for the various London theatres : you merely want to give their minds a chance of becoming impregnated with noble sentiments. And, of course, the plays selected for representation would have to be chosen with the utmost care.

Curious it is to note how, while the drama itself has sunk and decayed, the performer has steadily risen in public consideration. Plays now appear to consist either of revivals from another age, or of importations from other lands, hastily covered with a thin English veneer. Frankly, our dramatists to-day are not seriously considered : they consist chiefly of a few novelists who have taken to the stage as they might have gone in for a gamble on the Stock Exchange, a few industrious translators and adapters, a sprinkling of clever young fellows who can turn out passable “ lyrics ” for musical comedy, and one or two melancholy and superannuated writers who were once tolerably well-known playwrights. I am not merely, I think, a praiser of the past, a contemner of present times. We have still with us a few names that may last. But, speaking as a sober and unbiassed critic, I feel bound to say that I cannot detect at the moment many

dramatists who seem likely to develop into Goldsmiths or Sheridans. My chief consolation is that it is precisely at such moments of apparent barrenness that your new genius commonly arises.

But as for our players, I suppose there never has been an epoch in the history of the country when they have received more consideration. It began, I imagine, with the knighting of Sir Henry Irving at the hands of Queen Victoria. "This is with great pleasure" the Great Queen is said to have muttered as she performed the ceremony, but in her inmost heart did she not feel that she was sanctioning the break-up of all the old social order? Since those far-off days the knighting of actors has indeed become a commonplace. A pleasant habit of our kindly fountain of honour, who is probably aware that no other profession could be so greatly gratified at so modest a cost. The only trouble is that by a natural process the desire for an equal distinction will infect the ladies of the stage, and we really cannot have them all enrolled as Dames of the British Empire.

They have, however, the Picture Press, which plays up nobly to the constant demand for publicity. And, of course, it is always open to them to acquire titles in the open market, so to speak, by marriage—a method from which their male companions are mercifully debarred. One has a natural kindness for the favourites of the footlights, but I do not think, on serious reflection, that we need express too much sympathy with them on this account.

XIII

POETS LAUREATE

THE Laureate is one of those anachronistic survivals that please the antiquarian mind. His office, in the interests of historical continuity, should certainly be preserved, even as we guard our old castles and moated granges, our Monarchy and (to a limited extent) our House of Peers. The Poet Laureate has the advantage over some of these in that he is comparatively cheap. The late Lord Tennyson drew less than a hundred pounds a year from his exalted post—seventy-two pounds from the department of the Lord Chamberlain, and twenty-seven (in lieu of the historic tierce of Canary wine) from that of the Lord Steward. This was not exorbitant pay for a poet of Tennyson's reputation. But then it has never been the custom in England, at any rate recently, to reward our poets too handsomely. Like singing birds, it is perhaps considered that they perform the better for being sparingly fed.

The minstrel has been from the earliest times among the retinue of courts. Sometimes, no doubt, he was rated on much the same level as the jester or the Court monkey: sometimes, however, he has been employed on diplomatic and other errands of real importance. Mr. Austin himself expressed the opinion that a real poet should be capable of succeeding in any

line of business : but for the chance that led him to the flowery path of rhyme he might lead an army to victory, become a prominent member of the Cabinet, or die in the odour of sanctity as an archbishop. And some real poets have been men of affairs—in the past. Chaucer and Prior may be held to have distinguished themselves as diplomatists : Lord Macaulay (if we are to call him a poet) left his mark in India : Mr. Austin himself was a more than competent leader-writer in an important Conservative organ. But, generally speaking, it must be admitted that a reputation for good versification does not necessarily in these days inspire confidence in the poet's ability to manage even his own affairs. It is true that there have been exceptions, as Sir Ian Hamilton and the late Lord Beaconsfield, but a general or an administrator who published a book of verse would almost inevitably be regarded with suspicion ; and the better the verses the less likely would he be to find further employment. The *Standard* would hardly have employed Mr. Austin as a political leader-writer if he had been a great poet.

The great John Dryden was the first Poet Laureate appointed by letters patent. But before his time there had been a number who may be styled volunteers—a long line extending from Chaucer and Gower through Skelton and Spenser to Ben Jonson, for whom the position of Poet to the Royal Household was created by Charles I. After Dryden came Shadwell (who originated annual birthday odes), Nahum Tate (part author of a metrical version of the Psalms), Rowe, Eusden, Colley Cibber, Whitehead, Warton, Pye. The list up to this point is

hardly flattering to the fair fame of this country as a nursery of poets. But Southey succeeded Pye; and after Southey came Wordsworth and Tennyson. These, at the worst, are names still known to the reader of ordinary culture.

There ensued an interregnum. Four years elapsed after Tennyson's death before his successor was appointed. The devout put this down to a decent respect for the great man: we were to be allowed a season for recovery: there should be no unseemly wrangling for the reversion of that tierce of Canary, or its modern equivalent. The authorities assented readily enough to this view, for, to tell the honest truth, they could not think of a likely successor. There were other real poets yet alive. Swinburne and William Morris were considered by capable judges to possess something of the sacred fire. But they were not Court poets: it was felt that they could hardly be trusted to display that tactful yet robust loyalty that the office demanded. Admirers of Tennyson were anxious that the post should be abolished, lest a successor of inferior genius should tarnish the glory of the seat that he had occupied. Similar representations had been made when Wordsworth died, and the blameless Warton! But this, thought the politicians, would be going too far: it would be unwise to abolish a post for which use might well be found, some day. At the least, a laureate's crown might prove an inexpensive reward for party services, of a quasi literary sort. And so it happened that Lord Salisbury filled up the office that two successive prime ministers had left vacant, and Alfred Austin succeeded Alfred Tennyson as

Poet Laureate. In the words of another contemporary poet, the present editor of *Punch* :—

At length a callous Tory chief arose,
Master of caustic jest and cynic gibe,
Looked round the Carlton Club and lightly chose
Its leading scribe.

Few appointments have ever given rise to more unfavourable comment. During those four years the claims and chances of many poets had been discussed, from Lewis Morris to Rudyard Kipling, but the name of Alfred Austin had hardly been so much as mentioned. Yet the Prime Minister might very easily have made a worse choice. Austin was not a great poet, but he was perhaps a more considerable personality than most of his critics would allow. He possessed virtues characteristic of his country which are not too common among writers—a robust patriotism and a healthy love of outdoor life. Physically he was a small man, but he contrived to be something of a sportsman. He rode, and fished, and played lawn tennis with enthusiasm : he loved gardening, and wrote about his favourite pursuit in prose that had the merit of sincerity. And as to the occasional verse demanded from him by his office, he produced stuff that was neither better nor worse than some of his predecessors' loyal odes. He was, in short, a country gentleman of sound Tory views, who had inexplicably contrived to be also a minor poet. It is not a common combination. Your minor poet is in general the Cinderella of the literary family, dwelling in garrets rather than luxuriating in landscape gardens, and never dreaming of such princely pay as the gods award to leader-

writers in the daily press. But strange things may happen when you have a Premier for your fairy godmother.

Few poets have been more severely handled by the reviewers. But then perhaps few have given their critics so many glorious opportunities. Without wishing to do any disrespect to his memory, it is undeniable that he wrote on occasion the most exquisite balderdash. In his more ambitious poems he was for ever overstepping the elusive line that separates the sublime from the ridiculous. He seemed to delight in absurd and clumsy inversions. And yet, now and again, he would compose a short lyric that was instinct with the real feeling. The selection from his shorter pieces that was made by William Watson in 1890 contains most of his poetical work that is worth preserving, and some of it is very good indeed. The fact is, Alfred Austin was essentially a simple-minded man, who came to believe in himself because his friends united in praise of his poetry. He began to feel it incumbent upon a man in his position to embark upon long and ambitious works—philosophical dramas like *Prince Lucifer* and *Fortunatus the Pessimist*, or historical dramas like *Flodden Field* and *Savonarola*, which possessed no sort of interest either on the stage or in the closet. He even thought it necessary to write his autobiography, in two stout volumes, a work that may render a valuable service to future generations of psychologists. For it has, at least, the one crowning merit of a good autobiography: it enables us to understand the man. There is an unconscious self-revelation about the book that places it almost on a level with Boswell's *Life of John-*

son, or with the *Diary* of Samuel Pepys. I do not say that it is of equal merit from the literary point of view. But it is a human document. After reading it we begin to perceive some excuse for the inimitable seriousness with which the author treats himself and his work.

The book is astonishingly badly written. The fact is, the late Poet Laureate seemed to possess two different styles of writing, and that one which he reserved for literature (as apart from journalism) attracted to itself all the faults which were latent in his being. When he was writing the ordinary matter—leaders for the *Standard* or Paris correspondence during the Franco-German War of 1870—he could be as simple and straightforward as the next man. As soon as he began to picture himself as writing for posterity he became involved, obscure, bombastic and even ungrammatical. He was perhaps one of those men who produce their best work without too much preparation. He spoke admirably: it is not too much to say that he was one of the best after-dinner speakers I have ever heard. His words then seemed to fall naturally into literary form, whereas the elaborated sentences of his autobiography afflict the reader at every turn. And he did not improve the book by the many occasional verses which he dragged into the text.

I have said that Alfred Austin was, perhaps, too hardly treated by the reviewers. But if this was the case his friends made the balance even by injudicious praise. And he was a man of many friends. He might have been called the literary pet of the Conservative Party. Lord Beaconsfield was his political idol, and that astute politician repaid his admirer by

writing appreciatively of his verses. Lytton praised him : by implication, at any rate, George Eliot called him a poet. John Addington Symonds, Grant Allen and other well-known men of the day wrote him eulogistic letters. Armed with these testimonials, he could afford to disregard the storm of contemptuous amusement that broke upon the head of Tennyson's successor. He affected the reputation of a man who paid no heed to the denunciation of adverse critics : certainly he never attempted to justify himself in print. The attitude was no doubt good for his peace of mind, but I doubt whether it was equally good for his verse. He signalled his acceptance of the laureate's office by the publication, in *The Times*, of one of the worst poems he ever wrote—the verses on the Jameson Raid. Yet he survived that astonishing production. There must have been some virtue in the man who could go on writing, and selling, volumes of verse after that terribly false step.

Upon the lower slopes of Parnassus there is not too much good grazing, and it is well that the modest prize of the laureateship should occasionally descend to a poet not of the first rank. A deft constructor of light verse would, of course, be the very man for the post, were it merely a question of fitness for the duties involved. Who would be likely to produce, at demand, a pleasanter birthday ode or royal epithalamium than Sir Owen Seaman, let us say, or the late Mr. Austin Dobson. But there is a difference between men of this stamp and the late laureate. They are writers of light verse, while he was a Minor Poet ; which is to say that they have a sense of humour which was

denied to him. Your great poet seldom has an acute sense of humour, either : if he had, it is probable that he would cease to write great poetry. He takes himself very seriously, as a rule ; and this is the easiest part of his equipment for the imitator to acquire. He is not eminently tactful ; and here again it is comparatively simple for the smaller man to follow in his footsteps. But to my mind the Poet Laureate ought to be tactful, above everything. Most assuredly he should not take himself too seriously. I still rather regret that one of our humorous versifiers did not receive the bays instead of Mr. Robert Bridges. But that would have meant, I suppose, the beginning of the end of our long line of laureates.

XIV

DEVELOPMENTS IN MODERN JOURNALISM

SINCE I first began to write for a living a good many changes have overtaken the London journalist. Time was, in the early nineties, when the editor of a big daily made something of a figure in the land. He was the Editor : that was enough. When you or I chanced to have an idea for a series of bright and epoch-making articles, it was into the editor's more or less receptive ear that we poured our tale. True, that gentleman was not always very easily accessible : even now, with his glory so sadly shorn, he occasionally thinks it good for the aspirant's health to keep him waiting half an hour or more in an outer room before admitting him into the majesty of the Presence ; but at all events in those days he was in command. He could do things on his own responsibility.

I forget who it was who first made the astounding discovery that the important man on a daily paper was not the editor, but the manager. Possibly the business manager discovered this great fact himself : no doubt he had long suspected it, and suspicion became certainty when he beheld the remarkable influence wielded by the late Mr. Moberley Bell, then manager of *The Times*. For many years that remarkable man controlled the destinies of what we used to consider the first newspaper

in the world; and seeing the power that he wielded it was not surprising that several owners of other journals began to dream of the simple economy of discharging their editor and appointing in his place the gentleman who looked after the advertisements. The immediate result was a certain decentralisation, a delegation of power to subordinates. The news editor, the sports editor, the literary editor, the art editor, the society editor, all assumed an importance they had not possessed before. With their rise the glory of the editor-in-chief underwent some diminution. It may have recovered since; for the scheme of entrusting supreme authority to the man of business did not prove to be an unqualified success. By now he has, generally speaking, retreated to his own department again. But his advancement disturbed the original order of things. He brought a coldly commercial eye to bear upon the columns of his paper. Since his time it has been appreciably more difficult to sell anything that did not appeal to the largest possible reading public.

In those early days there still persisted the race of leader-writers, now decaying, if not already extinct. Time was when the young man, fresh from the University, looked toward journalism as a possible profession, or at the worst as a crutch to support him while he was making his way to fame and fortune with the novels and poems that he wrote to please himself and a grateful posterity. The position of leader-writer on a big morning paper was one of the prizes of the profession: grave and reverend elders were pointed out to him as having attained to this Olympian height, drawing

handsome salaries for the privilege of instructing some thousands of breakfast tables three mornings in the week. And it was not so superlatively difficult a job for a man of tolerably agile brain. The good journalist, then, was the man who could be trusted to write on any given subject with an air of omniscience, an occasional touch of scholarship, and a graceful turn of wit at the expense of the other side—all in three paragraphs of approximately equal length.

The leading article was undoubtedly heavy, and heaviness is the unforgivable sin in modern journalism. Compulsory education and the cheap press between them have produced a class of reader who is incapable of assimilating a paragraph containing more than a single statement. For his gratification the leader was gradually shortened until now, in the few cases where it exists at all, it clings painfully to a precarious existence in a sadly truncated form. Most of our modern dailies have now evolved a different and much shorter substitute, under a head-line that catches the eye of the most careless traveller. For the morning journalist had to find a form that would appeal not only to the leisurely citizen who can afford to give an hour or more to his *Times* after breakfast, but to the far more common case of the man of business who wants to learn as much as possible of yesterday's happenings in the twenty minutes' journey by tube or district railway to his city office. And before this gentleman appears upon the scene, there is the crowd of working-men who board the early trains, the throng of clerks and office-boys and shop-girls who have a penny to spare for amuse-

ment and information. All of them want something that they can understand, and at a glance. The direct and simple appeal to them : they are not yet capable of appreciating a closely reasoned argument ; and any touch of literary style would seem to them a mere mask for insincerity.

And one consequence of this is, that modern journalism no longer affords a field for the accomplished writer comparable with that it offered forty or fifty years ago. It is a commonplace to-day that the man with University training is at a discount among editors of our daily press—unless indeed his University training was confined to some popular branch of athletics. The ability to write is not regarded, but a well-known name at the head of a few disjointed remarks is worth money. This is how the modern expert came into his own. Your well-equipped journal must now have its staff of experts, qualified by actual experience to criticise the daily performance of cricketers, golfers, boxers and others who are in the lime-light for the moment. For editors have come to the conclusion that the public prefers to have its account of the Test Match or the final cup-tie from the pen of some brilliant amateur who has himself taken part in similar contests than to read an anonymous description, even by a master of the reporting art. It is true that some of the great players who have thus been dragged into the service of an enterprising press have found occasionally no little difficulty in stringing together the few simple sentences required of them. The curious observer may be amused to note the air of relief with which they drag in, at the first opportunity, some

out-worn journalistic tag that has stuck in their memory. That sounds to them like the real thing : it is old, and safe : recognisable as a mark of the trade. But a plague on this journalism, that demands so many formulæ of a poor fellow !

I am not saying that some of these experts are not very good indeed at their job. Some of our golf experts, for example, write excellently, handling the pen no less skilfully than the iron or the putter. But then Horace Hutchinson, one of the first of that noble order, was a writer by nature and instinct. He would have taken to the writing of books in any case, even if the editing of the Badminton book on Golf had not chanced to be placed in his worthy hands. And I suppose the eminent authority who contributes to-day to *The Times* those admirable essays instinct with modest scholarship would have found some other outlet for his literary talent if he had not been permitted to discourse about the Royal and Ancient game.

Yes ! the golf expert is a being apart, a happy mortal (commonly) who can write as well as play. I have no quarrel with him—indeed for a time I once served in those ranks myself. But I do object to the growing practice of getting a name, and a name only, to place at the head of a column that is written, or at best trimmed into shape, by someone else. And it is hard on the unfortunate journalist who has worked hard to fit himself for the task, say, of reporting first-class lawn tennis if he suddenly finds himself thrust into the background to make room for some famous player who is probably incapable of stringing together two sentences in English without assistance.

Your old-fashioned journalist was a journalist. The world was his province : he considered himself (and was considered by his editor) perfectly capable of handling anything that cropped up in the day's work. He could turn you out his informative article on the University Boat Race, or the Gentlemen *v.* Players at Lord's, or the final of the Association Cup-ties at Wembley, without ever having taken part in any of these performances himself. He took all these things in the day's work, just as he would have taken a Coronation or a civic procession. And, generally speaking, I suspect he turned out as good an account as his successor. But then journalism in the nineteenth century was anonymous, and that made a lot of difference.

The military and naval experts were in being, I suppose, even earlier than the expert on sport, but it was not until the South African War that they really came into their own. (The military expert, that is to say : it took longer for the Silent Service to emerge into the light of newspaper publicity.) At that time every little periodical had to possess a war editor. Never before in the history of journalism had there been so great a demand for military writers. Demand outrunning supply, we had some of the strangest specimens employed here and there—men who had once been in the ranks, or held a commission in some pre-historic corps of volunteers, or perhaps been in a cadet corps at school. Those were great days for the man who had once been through a course of drill. But when the Great War broke upon us the demand for military experts, for some reason or other, was not nearly so brisk.

I suppose it was hopeless to attempt keeping up the supply : so many were required at the back of the front. Still, one or two colonels gallantly held the breach—to say nothing of Mr. Hilaire Belloc.

The fact is, that in all countries and all professions the general practitioner must give way to the specialist. He who intends to succeed in modern journalism should select some subject as early as possible and make it his own. Let him go to Asia Minor or the Southern Pacific, to Siberia or the Yukon, choose his own district, and set to work to become the recognised oracle upon his special portion of the earth's surface. Or, again, let him specialise on some subject of general interest, such as poultry farming or volcanic eruptions. He has but to read a standard work or two, subscribe to a press-cutting agency, and file his information neatly : in due course he will find his opportunity of enlightening the world. Some day he may even write a book on his pet subject, and put up his prices accordingly. For self-preservation, the unhappy journalist of to-day must pose as an expert on something, whether he possesses any qualifications or not.

No doubt I am old-fashioned, but I sometimes feel a slight grudge against this intrusion of the alien into our preserves. Journalists should have their trade union—but then it is not really a skilled trade. Anyone can make a show at it—anyone, that is to say, who has received a tolerable education. What am I saying? Anyone who is capable of dictating a few scattered sentences to an assistant by his side will do for some of us. I think sometimes that

no man, woman or child should be permitted to appear in print without passing some sort of examination. There should be a diploma, granted after Government examinations held annually at various centres, without which not even a former stroke of the Oxford eight, a sometime Test Match century-maker, should be allowed to sign an article. And not only for the journalist should this be obligatory, but even more so for the writer of books. There is enough bad writing in the world already, from various causes. Book-buyers are dying out, in spite of the gallant efforts of those who would persuade them that a novel is a more durable pleasure than a visit to the theatre. They should be protected from the assault of the incompetent amateur. The dentist, in this country, must have his licence: the novelist may set the teeth of a whole nation on edge without hindrance.

XV

“THE DIVERSIONS OF PURLEY”

A DIVERSITY of opinion among the critics is commonly held, in these days, the best fortune that can chance upon a new book ; and the more violently these gentlemen quarrel among themselves as to its merits, the better for the sale of the object of discussion. There must be some value in a work which arouses the partisan spirit, and I suppose there have been few works of solid worth in the world's history that have not been violently assailed by some, and as warmly praised by others. *The Diversions of Purley*, by John Horne Tooke, had perhaps more than its due share of praise and blame. It contained a good deal that was novel (sufficient to offend the good old sticklers for tradition), and the author had the reputation of being a dangerous fellow, a firebrand, a red revolutionary. In those days, sad to say, the reviews and magazines sometimes suffered their judgment of literature to be warped by political prejudice. If you were a Tory, you need expect no mercy from a Whig review : even if you had been rash enough merely to employ a publisher of the wrong political colour, it was heavy odds against your receiving fair treatment. They took their political opinions very seriously in the eighteenth century.

And, in the eyes of many worthy men, John

Horne Tooke no doubt seemed a noxious reptile, against whom any weapon was permissible. A treasonable rogue (without respect for God or his King) who had the impudence to write political pamphlets under the guise of discussions on etymology. Probably few men have ever made enemies with a more reckless impetuosity than the famous Parson Horne—the man who silenced Wilkes, who attacked and defeated the terrible Junius, “after statesmen, judges and generals had fled before him.” He was a literary Ishmael, who dealt out blows right and left with an engaging impartiality and freedom. His father, the poulterer of Newport Street (to whom his son at school was wont to refer humorously as a Turkey merchant), contested and won a lawsuit against royalty, in the person of that Frederick, Prince of Wales, whose untimely demise exercised so many youthful poets of the time. Perhaps through this fact the son inherited a bias against received authority. It was unfortunate that his father should have bought for him the right of presentation to a chapel-of-ease, at New Brentford, for that meant that the young rebel suffered himself to be persuaded into taking orders.

This, I suppose, may be reckoned the cardinal error of his life. England, at the close of the eighteenth century, had no use for a turbulent priest; nor had young Horne any business with a Geneva gown. He wore his orders as lightly as any man could even in those days, when it was possible to make them easy enough for most, but he still chafed under their restriction. He wrote of his ordination to Wilkes with an assumed cheerfulness and a natural blasphemy.

"It is true," his letter ran, "that I have suffered the infectious hand of a bishop to be waved over me; whose imposition, like the sop given to Judas, is only a signal for the devil to enter." This was when he was tutoring young Elwes, son of the once famous miser, in France. A passage in an early appreciation has a sound paragraph on this matter:—

It was a real misfortune to a man of an enterprising disposition, and one regardless, as Horne Tooke was, of the means by which such a disposition may be indulged, to become a member of an order in which propriety and duty enjoin a sparing and partial interference with the concerns of the world, and in which, if propriety and duty are found too feeble restraints, the law interposes with a strong arm, to curb profane activity and unprofessional exertions.

It was the strong arm of the law that brought about, indirectly, the publication of Horne Tooke's first etymological study. At the outbreak of the American War of Independence he had issued an advertisement applying for subscriptions on behalf of the widows and orphans of the men "barbarously murdered by the king's troops at Lexington and Concord." This attitude of mind, so peculiarly frequent in this country, was handled more severely a century ago than it is now, and the adventurous pamphleteer was sentenced to a fine of £200 and twelve months' imprisonment. He employed his time in durance by writing his *Letter to Mr. Dunning, on the English Particle*, which was occasioned by a phrase used by one of his counsel at the trial. Out of this small beginning sprang the whole two volumes of "Επεα Πτερόεντα,

or *The Diversions of Purley*. Some say, with Coleridge, that all that is worth anything in the *Diversions* is to be found in the *Letter*. From the purely philological point of view that may be the case.

The great Dr. Johnson read this etymological discussion, and expressed a hope that they did not put the dog in the pillory for his libel; he had too much literature for that. His biographer considered (not unreasonably) that Johnson was hardly treated with sufficient respect; but the lexicographer was candid enough to say that if he were to issue a new edition of his Dictionary he would adopt several of Mr. Horne's etymologies. Certainly Mr. Horne (although he quoted this compliment, with a slight alteration of the word “several,” in his *Diversions*) was far from treating the doctor, or anyone else, with respect. He seldom mentions him without a word or two of disparagement, and he seizes every occasion to comment unfavourably upon his derivations. He remarks, in a footnote, that “Johnson's Grammar and History and Dictionary of what *he calls* the English language, are in all respects, except the bulk of the latter, most truly contemptible performances. . . . Nearly one-third of this Dictionary is as much the language of the Hottentots as of the English.” Yet he admitted that he could never read the preface to that monumental work without shedding a tear.

Horne's change of name was connected with the curious title that he chose for his book—a title not particularly suitable for a grave philological treatise. There is, indeed, a story of an indulgent father who was so misled by the

name that he ordered the two large volumes from the local bookseller as a toy-book for his small son. One imagines that those were times when children's books were sufficiently rare to make anxious parents eager to secure them at any cost, and regardless of their merit. But the estate of Purley, near Croydon, where the work was chiefly composed, came to Horne by the bequest of Mr. William Tooke, with the proviso that he should assume that name in addition to his own. The bequest was made, say the books, in return for a bold and very characteristic action on Horne's part. Tooke was one of the four friends who had joined in supplying the young parson with an income when he had left the Church and applied himself to studying law. He now found himself suddenly involved in a lawsuit concerning his manorial rights with a rich neighbour, who had applied to Parliament for an Inclosure Act, which would have seriously depreciated Tooke's Purley estate. In his distress he applied to Horne, who immediately took the bold and singular course of writing a violent libel on the Speaker of the House of Commons in reference to this Inclosure Bill, and obtained its insertion in the *Public Advertiser*.

The next morning, not unnaturally, found the libeller before the assembled House in the custody of the serjeant-at-arms. Horne had no nervousness in little matters of this kind : was he not afterwards tried for his life, for treason, and did he not contrive to convert the proceedings into something very like a farce ? On this occasion he delivered in his defence a speech so remarkable in itself, and so trenchant in its criticism of the proposed injustice, that the

Bill was reconsidered and the clause which affected his friend's property expunged. Tooke was grateful, and without a family : he made Horne his heir ; and the famous fighting parson became proprietor of Purley in 1803, and was known thenceforward to the world as John Horne Tooke.

Upon this country house he conferred, if not perpetual fame, at all events a considerable notoriety. There was a time when the *Diversions* were ranked among the classics of literature. Lord Brougham, that most omniscient of men and Chancellors, said of it : “ He has made out of the driest subjects in the whole range of literature one of the most amusing and even lively of books ; nor did any one ever take up the *Diversions of Purley* (as he has quaintly chosen to call it) and lay it down until some other avocation tore it from his hands.” And to the student of language at that date no doubt some of Tooke's suggestions seemed the height of ingenuity. For those were the happy, careless days of the philologist, when the derivation of words was an interesting pastime—a sort of parlour game at which any tolerably educated guest could join—and professors had scarcely begun to consider that any further equipment than native wit might be useful to the performer. History and geography were of no account : etymologists had not then realised that words seldom came into a language without some definite reason ; and any accidental resemblance to a word of similar meaning in a language of totally alien family was sufficient for their simple faith. Horne Tooke was one of the most ingenious of these guessers—though perhaps he was also something more.

He started, at all events, with a definite hypothesis, a theory of language for which he was prepared to make considerable sacrifices.

The *Diversions* are written in the form of a dialogue, the personages in the first part (published in 1786) being the author, his friend Mr. William Tooke, and Dr Beadon, afterwards Bishop of Gloucester. The second part (published in 1798) is a duet between the author and Sir Francis Burdett. In each case the speakers are distinguished by the initial letters of their names. H.—the author—opens with a few remarks on language in general. “The first aim of Language was to communicate our thoughts; the second, to do it with *dispatch*.” The errors of grammarians are traced to the fact that they suppose all words to be the signs of things or of ideas, whereas many words are merely abbreviations. We talk, in fact, in a sort of shorthand. There are but two sorts of words which are necessary for the communication of thought, says the author a little later, and those are Nouns and Verbs.

This pronouncement may be regarded as the keynote of Horne Tooke’s work. He maintains that, since conversation can be carried on with no more than these two parts of speech, language originally consisted of nothing else. From these nouns and verbs derived all the rest—adjectives, conjunctions and prepositions—with the powerful aid of Abbreviation and Corruption. As he very justly points out, these two great moulders of language are always busiest with the words which are most frequently in use. So he takes the conjunctions first (which undoubtedly have a great deal of

work to do) and contrives to find a verb at the root of each. “If” is the imperative of A.S. *gifan*, to give—a plausible guess that held long acceptance among unscientific etymologists. Emboldened by this explanation, he asserts that “in short there is not such a thing as a *conjunction* in *any* Language, which may not, by a skilful Herald, be traced home to its own family and origin.” So skilful a herald does he prove himself, that almost the whole tribe of conjunctions—if, an, unless, eke, yet, still, else, though, but, and, without—are all discovered to be imperatives in like manner.

He attempted to distinguish two “buts”—a long and a short—the first being a contracted form of “be out,” and the second the imperative of *botan*, to boot. Where imperatives will not serve his turn he presses participles into the service. Thus “lest” is the past participle of *lesan*, to dismiss; and he takes occasion here to handle Johnson’s suggestion (as from the adjective least) rather roughly. “Since,” in like manner, he makes a participle of *seon*, to see. This is the worst of attempting to evolve a consistent theory. A little time expended in tracing the history of the word would have revealed the earlier form *sithens* or *sithence*. And in the same light way he applied the same method to the prepositions. Thus “between” was “be (imperative) twain,” and the same imperative entered into beneath, below, beside, before, behind and others.

When we come to the adjectives and substantives there are some interesting specimens of ingenious derivation. Thus “odd” he makes to be the participle “owed” (for we say, when counting by pairs, one pair, two pairs, etc., and

one pair ow'd or odd). "Loud," again, is the participle of low, to bellow. "Field" is a felled space, as opposed to woodland. "Twist," "quilt," "want," "tight," in the same way are merely the participles twic'd, quill'd, waned, tied. So "bacon" is the participle of bake: a stern man is one whose emotions have been stirred: a coward one who has cowered before the enemy and a craven one who has stooped to crave his life. In this last suggestion, though the word is by no means a past participle, he got somewhere within hailing distance of the truth. And in suggesting "wrong" as the past participle of wring, on the analogy of the French *tort*, he scored a centre.

The merit of the *Diversions* was fully recognised in its own day, and for some time afterwards: then came the scientific philologist and exploded the author's ingenious guesses one after the other until there was little left of the book to praise or blame. As a guide to students it certainly cannot be recommended at the present time, but it is worth looking through even now. Its chief merit lay in the undoubted impetus that it gave to the study of the subject. It set men thinking: it pointed out the road to historical investigation (for he did his best in general to find the earliest forms of the words he analysed), and it had the crowning merit of originality. Even at the present day its humour, its liveliness, and its political or personal asides make it readable enough to all who are interested in the literature of the end of the eighteenth century.

XVI

POLITICS AND LITERATURE

THE combination of politics and the practice of letters is becoming rare in England, and perhaps in other countries as well. Or possibly it might be more just to say that it is less successful than it was; that we fail to produce now men who are at once considerable politicians and in the front rank as authors—men of the stamp of Lord Macaulay and Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield. I say this well knowing that there may be at the present moment Members of Parliament, of tolerably high standing, who have written agreeably in the past, and may do so again. (Indeed, it has been a difficult matter to restrain some of them from writing in the public press, when there happened to be a lull in the political tumult.) Ministers of the Crown, in sufficient numbers, have produced books—some of them quite good books. We have still with us Mr. Augustine Birrell, who won his literary spurs so many years ago that he is almost in danger of being forgotten by the rising generation; or would be had he not lent his name incidentally to the dictionary makers, as did the late Captain Boycott, to form an active verb. We have also the Earl of Birkenhead, Lord Grey of Fallodon, and, I daresay, a sufficiency of peers who are but seldom in the House of Lords. But, with a very

few exceptions, it may safely be said that the ardent politician cares little for letters: the man who produces original literature is not really keen on politics. There is, of course, Mr. Winston Churchill, but he stands in a category by himself. We do not pretend to measure Genius with our little two-foot rule.

But with that one exception what authors of eminence have we had recently in Parliament? We have a certain number of publicists, of gossiping journalists, of men who produce books of a certain sort. But I find it difficult to recall the name of any real literary personage. Sir Gilbert Parker, I believe, still sits in the House. For some time he had as companions two other well-known novelists in Mr. Hilaire Belloc and Mr. A. E. W. Mason. They came, saw, and were conquered: the Mother of Parliaments proved too strong for them: and Mr. Belloc has never ceased since to declare his conviction that the whole system of party government is rotten to the core.

There has been of late years a general increase in the pace of political life—a “speeding up,” as the modern phrase has it—which is probably alien to the literary mind. I daresay it began with the resolution that our legislators should be paid for their services. Remunerated with the handsome fee of four hundred pounds a year, our members were filled with new-born zeal: they felt that it was time to give their country some show of value for its money; and accordingly they proceeded to bring forward and pass new bills at breakneck speed and often after very inadequate consideration. Why, indeed, should your ordinary Member of Parliament ever stop to consider seriously what he is

doing? He is merely the creature of his party, and must obey as such the dictates of the machine. Now, your Man of Letters, at the worst, has a sort of pride, or call it obstinacy, if you will. He believes in his own judgment: he holds that he was chosen to this responsible post because of some intellectual superiority of his own over his fellows, and it would clearly be absurd not to utilise his opportunities in the public interest. For this reason he is apt to prove a difficult subject for the party authorities to manage, for these require above all things men who will do what they are told and come to heel sharply at the crack of the party whip. Members of Parliament to-day must be prepared to vote as they are bid, and argue to order. It is no doubt for this reason that we find so many legal gentlemen in the House. And the place that used to be filled by the Man of Letters is now commonly occupied by the journalist.

I remember some little time ago that the late Lord Morley (himself a Man of Letters of the true type) took occasion when presiding at a complimentary dinner to a well-known journalist, to remark upon the number of prime ministers in his day who had made their mark in print. Had they been drawn by the necessities of life into the journalistic world he, in his editorial days, would have been glad to pay any of the five (so he declared) a very handsome salary. Perhaps we should not take the words of an after-dinner speaker too seriously; but I note it as remarkable that Lord Morley, a capable editor as well as our leading example of the combined politician and literary man, should instinctively have appraised the worth

of these gentlemen in terms of the *Pall Mall Gazette* rather than as a literary critic. But the fact is, Parliament is not a good school for the writer. Literary quality is apt to find itself swamped in the desire to prove a thesis. The habit of debate possesses his soul. Thus it was even in the days of Macaulay, who wrote his *History of England* and found it turn under his hands to a Defence of Whiggery.

But the name of Macaulay remains, and will remain, a bright spot in the literary-political history of his time. He may have been partisan, but he was honest. He preserved a stout and consistently independent attitude throughout his career. He entered Parliament first as member for Calne, then a "pocket borough" of the Lord Lansdowne of that day, but he made an express stipulation that he was to have complete liberty of action. And when he took office, in 1832, he was always prepared to sacrifice his place rather than his convictions. It was still possible then for a Member of Parliament to speak his mind in debate and to record his vote according to his conscience. A man could still enter the House of Commons and preserve his self-respect. He did not feel then that he had to keep his name before his constituents at any cost, under pain of being asked to resign if he failed to take a sufficient share in debate, or keep up his number of attendances, or make himself sufficiently conspicuous at question-time. The fear of the local paper was not always before his eyes. So Gibbon, that stately and sonorous historian, could sit seven years for Liskeard, recording none but silent votes. Pride hastened to excuse a natural timidity, and he confessed

that even "the success of my pen discouraged the trial of my voice." Yet as his training in the Southampton militia enabled him to examine the battles of antiquity with an intelligent eye, so he could persuade himself that his parliamentary experience was not wholly without value. "The eight sessions that I sat in Parliament," he wrote, "were a school of civil prudence, the first and most essential virtue of an historian."

The great speakers filled Gibbon with despair, the bad ones with apprehension—to employ once more his own magnificent stateliness of phrase. More than half a century earlier a similar diffidence made an equally silent member of Addison, who presented the curious spectacle, unthinkable in these more loquacious days, of a silent Secretary of State. The great essayist is recorded, perhaps apocryphally, to have made one attempt at parliamentary oratory, but his shyness overcame him, and he sat down in confusion. On the whole, our literary politicians have not invariably attained a success as public speakers such as might be augured from the command of language displayed in the printed book. Against Macaulay, Sheridan, Disraeli must be set Addison, Gibbon and perhaps John Stuart Mill. Yet Mill, though not an eloquent debater, was heard with attention, and his career in Parliament may be said to have extended his influence.

As might be expected, the historian and the philosopher have bulked more largely in active political life than the poet. Yet Andrew Marvell and Matthew Prior sat in Parliament, and the latter was secretary to the Embassy at The Hague and afterwards to the plenipo-

tentiaries who concluded the Peace of Ryswick. A lighter strain in verse has proved not incompatible with a certain success in the House of Commons. W. M. Praed and Richard Monckton Milnes may be cited as examples. Among novelists there have been Disraeli and Bulwer Lytton. The life has held its attraction for even greater names. Thackeray stood for Oxford in 1857, but was defeated, perhaps fortunately, by Mr. Cardwell, afterwards Secretary for War and the author of that short-service system which (according to the old gentlemen in the Service Clubs) was going to wreck the British Army, or what had been left of it since their own retirement. Ten years later Thackeray's biographer, Anthony Trollope, followed his example and stood for Beverley, also without success. I have no doubt many others have tried since. But I doubt whether modern parliamentary life offers many opportunities to gentlemen with qualities possessed by the successful novelist. I admit, however, that it would be interesting to see what Mr. H. G. Wells made of it, could he but get himself elected.

Whatever appeal politics may make to literature it is clear that literature, in itself, makes but the smallest appeal to our politicians. I do not mean that Ministers of the Crown are notorious for not reading books: it is quite likely that with the scanty time at their disposal they may compare favourably enough with the Man of Business or even the hunting man in the shires. I mean simply that the Man of Letters of the present day receives very scanty notice from those in power in the way of honours or rewards; and what little he obtains is almost invariably bestowed upon him

(as though of set purpose) for some other reason than for his achievement as an author. Carlyle was offered a baronetcy by Sir Robert Peel: Tennyson was raised to the peerage: knighthoods were "produced," in classic phrase, for Sir Lewis Morris and Sir Walter Besant. But since then I confess I can think of no author, with the possible exception of Sir James Barrie, who has been included in the list of honours for purely literary reasons; and if Sir James had not deserted books for the stage I doubt very much whether he would to-day have been a baronet. So, too, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle owes his title to services rendered in the South African War: Sir Arthur Quiller Couch and Sir Gilbert Parker were knighted for political services. Knighthoods, I admit, are but barren honours; but if we may no longer look for embassies at The Hague, like Mat Prior, or even consulships such as fell to the lot of Charles Lever, they remain, I suppose, about the most we can expect. And when they are bestowed upon writers I maintain that they should be given as a reward for excellence in their own work rather than for a combination of literary talent with political or other services.

XVII

THE SILENT STAGE

IT is not, perhaps, altogether silent, in these days. There are noises "off"—the crack of the automatic, the throb of the automobile, the splash of the villain (or the comedian) as he is sent flying backwards into the ornamental water. Still—there is no actual speech—as yet. I do not know that I wish for it.

After all, there is something about seeing the creations of the dramatist interpreted by living men and women. You can never get the same authentic thrill, I suppose, from the ingenious contrivances of the skilled photographer. (Yet I daresay there are those who have fallen in love with Miss Mary Pickford on the screen, or with one of the fair Sisters Gish, or Gloria Swanson—let us drop these barren prefixes!) But they are the young: we who had the fortune to see Ellen Terry in the old days sit silent, with a curl of the lips.

I do not say that the Silent Stage is altogether despicable, but it can never be quite the same thing. It has grown during the last twenty years. When I was a small boy they had at my grandfather's house an ingenious toy called, I think, the "Zoetrope," which we twirled round, gazing through slits in the side. I suppose this was the first rude beginnings of the idea. But I am not proposing to recall

the date when the cinematograph first swam into our drab lives. We wish to keep as young as we may.

I remember very well the first time I ever saw on a screen the flickering pictures that have done so much since to ruin the eyesight of this country and the moral tone of Southern California. It was at one of those exhibitions that used in bygone years to be held annually at Earl's Court—home of the water chute and the scenic railway and the great wheel and the witching waves, and heaven alone knows what other ancient and half-forgotten delights. But to get at this particular sideshow it was necessary to pass into the furthest court of all, beyond the confines of the Welcome Club (do you still remember the Welcome Club?) and away past the bandstand, leaving it on the starboard side. Out there, in the intervals of a selection from *Carmen* you might hear a hoarse but penetrating voice croaking almost without cessation :—

This Way to the Animated Photographs !

For in those early days that was what we used to call them. And not such a bad name, either, when you come to consider possible alternatives.

Curious it is how some names manage to survive, in spite of the best efforts of the public press. Time was when "Biographs" looked to have a decent chance. Intrinsically, it was a good word enough ; not one of your hybrids that move the scholar to wrath. Then there was "Bioscope"—also a possibility, with the advantage that it had not been taken before and used for another meaning. We might well

have still been going to-day to see the bioscope, but for the fact that our ingenious neighbours the French took up the new plaything and developed it while we were engaged with something else. When it returned to this country it was dowered with a French name, to which it has clung with a touching faithfulness, ever since.

There are differences of pronunciation, I admit. Even of spelling, if you set up for a purist, and a Grecian. Judges of the High Court, and other pestilent fellows who went to school in the days when they had compulsory Greek instead of modern languages or Natural Science, will probably insist on "kinema," with the second syllable long. We need not pay too much attention to these pedants. They forget that the word came to us through France, which has its own way of dealing with Greek, as with most things. Besides, there are plenty of other terms we can use. We can speak of the "pictures" or the "movies" (this is considered in some quarters almost as bad as dropping an aspirate) or, if we wish to adopt a semi-professional attitude, of the "screen" or the "films." But, call it what we will, the cinema is now an integral part of our daily life—much more so than the legitimate theatre.

And how long a road it has travelled since those tentative efforts that we watched at the Exhibition! Then the art of the producer had scarcely gone beyond the representation of a single dancing girl, posturing, twisting and grimacing in the midst of flickering and disconcerting spots of light. But soon, after the French the Americans took it in hand; and

when America gets hold of something new it may be trusted to carry it forward to the furthest possible limit in the way of development. You have only to observe what this great country has accomplished with such refractory material as bridge and lawn tennis.

Even now, I suppose, the high-brow (as they pleasantly call him across the Atlantic) will have little to do with the cinema. He regards it as a low and bastard form of art, with no merit but that of cheapness. Still, that undoubtedly is a merit. And there is also a certain comfort. At the picture theatre the spectator is commonly better seated than at the other. He is not too crowded—and he is allowed to smoke. True, the first few moments have their dangers. To those whose eyesight, like my own, is not quite what it was, the sudden transition from the outer daylight to the gloomy interior of the house makes the finding of a vacant seat rather a precarious business. I take care now to explore a seat very thoroughly before I venture to lower myself definitely into it.

But, once there, I hold that the entertainment is not wholly to be despised. The humorous pictures, I own, sometimes leave me merely lukewarm. Even the great Chaplin does not always carry me with him. The comic producer, it seems to me, relies too exclusively on violence for his effects. Now and again he rips a laugh out of the spectator, but it is given grudgingly and of necessity, and he checks it for shame as soon as he can. Laughter, we feel, should not be too much at the mercy of mere mechanical devices—of water hose, and dust-shoots, and masses of sticky dough, and ice-

cream that covers the eater's face as with whiskers. Yet even these, given time, will produce their effect. I have seen repetition wear down the endurance of the most scornful, so that he has rolled in his seat with laughter. "Batter often enough at the same spot, and in the end you shall win through," is the motto of the successful producer. If one man falling backwards into a duck-pond or a horse-trough will not serve his turn, let him try two, three, a procession. Experiment has proved that it is all but impossible to overdo these things, to repeat an effect too often for the general public.

Perhaps, so far, there is a lack of subtlety about the film artist. He aims too often at capturing his audience by direct attack, by a brutal assault on the emotions. Watch him when he comes to the pathetic parts. He leaves nothing to the imagination: he spares no detail that could by any possibility squeeze one more tear from the reluctant eyes of his congregation. One has a feeling that it is unfair, that the photographer is taking a mean advantage of us. He not only pictures for us the heroine sobbing on her truckle bed in the cheap boarding house, to which the machinations of the villain have brought her at length from the country farm, but he must needs revive for our benefit those happier scenes of the past that come unbidden to her mind at that supreme moment. He is too intimate, this fellow: he is taking an unwarrantable liberty. We furtively rub our eyes with a handkerchief, but with a sort of resentment. Has the man never learned the meaning of Reticence?

But they advance. Heavens ! they advance far too swiftly for my own peace of mind. As a practising novelist, I find myself now and again muttering a prayer that these film merchants may not learn their nefarious trade too quickly. For if they do, which of us would have a chance ? Theirs is a so much easier appeal than ours : they can reach the half-educated so much more readily. They can get thrills into their work that the skilfullest of us can only adumbrate in cold print. They can put up a railway accident, the sinking of the *Titanic*, battle scenes by land and sea, in any clime and at any epoch of history, chariot races and boat races, bull-fights or gladiatorial combats in the amphitheatre of ancient Rome, and so that the dullest of us can see the scene actually taking place before our eyes. They can give us live men and women in the age of Nero or of Queen Victoria, so that we can see them and believe. If they could only control the exuberance of their "legends" and persuade the director not to overdo the pathetic element there can be little doubt that they would sweep us out of existence.

Some day, I expect, they will. The prophet Wells saw the danger many years ago. But there is always a hope that they will try far too much. There is talk now of microphone attachments that will give us speech as well. I do not know that the most enthusiastic admirers of some of these stars could stand that. But there ! America is always apt to overdo her effects.

XVIII

NOVEL WRITING

IT is perhaps, from the commercial point of view, no very satisfactory profession—this of the novelist. The man of business may be excused for wondering why any sane man should embark upon such troubled waters, when every day the weather prophets are busy foretelling further storms, cyclones and depressions from the Atlantic. (I never remember the time when the market for books was considered in a really flourishing condition.) Nevertheless, gallant fellows enough, to carry on our metaphor, run their little cockle-shells daily down the beach, step boldly on board (with a sharp intake of the breath as the first cold douche of criticism breaks over them) and toss merrily awhile in the surf before they pass out of sight and are lost in the great waters. Some five or six a day, on an average, thus tempt fortune; not all, of course, for the first time. It is an inspiring thought.

We are, I suppose, creatures of a sanguine temper: the very nature of our work demands that we should have a high opinion of our own powers. Of my many acquaintances labouring in the field of fiction I cannot at the moment point to more than one or two who suffer from an excess of modesty. Bear in mind, too, that it demands some courage to start on so por-

tentious an essay—a book of eighty thousand words at the least, narrating the actions and detailing the conversation of a set of imaginary characters, who must somehow be given a semblance of life sufficient to persuade the casual reader to take a passing interest in their adventures. Let the layman place himself in our position: let him equip himself with a fountain pen, or possibly a typewriting machine, and sit down solemnly before a sheet of fair white paper, every morning after breakfast. It is a daunting thought that he will have somehow to fill more than three hundred of those quarto pages, thirty lines or so to the page, before his task is accomplished. But he is, let us suppose, a fellow of the right spirit: he plunges hardily into his self-imposed labour, and actually manages to complete a chapter or two. Then, when he pauses for a moment to read over in cold blood what he has set down, is the time that tries the fortitude of the stoutest. I confess now that I seldom dare to read over what I have written until I have got somewhere near the end of the book. If we stop to reflect we are apt to find ourselves overwhelmed with a sad conviction of the futility of the whole thing. Why did we ever vainly imagine that we could write a novel?

There are also, the timorous may recall, a vast number of us at work in these days. Reading, as I sometimes do, not entirely for amusement, some four or five novels a week, I am commonly surprised to find so few of them entirely worthless. I do not mean to say that any great proportion of them are works of genius, or even well written. Dr. Johnson complained that style was equally diffused in his

own day: with the crowd that have now invaded the province of letters I do not think many critics will repeat that particular charge. Many of our novelists write extremely badly. Grammatical errors of the grossest kind flaunt themselves openly on the printed page: laboured and involved constructions are frequent: slipshod English and careless spelling are to be found everywhere. I do not say that, like several worthy but old-fashioned critics, we should judge of novels by no other test than that of literary excellence, but I confess that blemishes of this kind go far to destroy much of the pleasure I should find in a book. I dislike reading an author who persistently uses words in a wrong sense. But that, of course, is merely because I happen to have received a classical education. It is the irritation of the expert: not otherwise will the man who has sailed before the mast turn up his nose at a sea story written by someone who knows the ocean merely from the deck of a liner. I do not say that the breed of novelists is dying out because the majority of them do not know their own language. There are other qualities to be looked for in the novelist besides that of being able to write correctly and agreeably. The bulk of modern readers require nothing but a story, and there are many able ladies and gentlemen who can construct a story admirably. Let the public have plenty of incident, brisk and natural dialogue, a bright manner of narration—and they will not ask for anything further. The novel to-day is often just a commercial product, bearing no relation whatsoever to literature.

Good writing and characterisation—the two

qualities that are indispensable to a great novel—are, in fact, scarcely noticed by most modern readers. I suspect the ordinary consumer of novels now does not spend much time in reading the old masters. Houses that have a library probably still possess editions of Scott, Thackeray and Dickens ; but I suspect that they are not often taken down from the shelves. It is a sad reflection, but I am confident that if *Quentin Durward*, or *Vanity Fair*, or *Martin Chuzzlewit* were offered to the London trade to-day as new books by unknown authors they would meet with a very poor reception. Their authors had not learned then what to leave out. Scott's prefatory and introductory remarks alone would often fill as many pages as a modern novelist requires for his whole book. Thackeray, they would say, had the pestilent habit of turning round and addressing his readers with long apostrophic reflections on things in general. Dickens invented so many subsidiary characters and contrived such a host of side-issues that he was almost forced, as it were, to strike a balance sheet at the end of his books, telling the anxious reader what reward or punishment was to be meted out to all the secondary personages who had flitted across his pages. I dare not imagine what a modern publisher would say to that other habit of interpolating whole stories into the text, such as "The Stroller's Tale" in the third chapter of *The Pickwick Papers*.

The fact is that, so far as construction goes, the technique of the novel has been improved out of all recognition during the last thirty or forty years. The writer has learned the advantage of keeping his story well in view from

start to finish. He has discovered that the one thing he must not do is to allow the readers' attention to wander. For it is far more likely to wander than it was in the days of the great Victorians ; and this is not entirely due to the inferiority of the modern artist. It is due rather to the rise of a new and half-educated reading public, who have been brought up on a somewhat scrappy diet and find some difficulty at present in settling down to good, solid, substantial fare. It remains to be seen whether these new readers (as the optimists assert) will some day be educated up to a higher level. At present they are incapable of absorbing a paragraph of more than five or six lines in length, at the outside. They require a series of shocks to stimulate their interest, and consequently most of the novelists who cater for their simple tastes have learned the imprudence of prolixity or sustained argument. The pages of a novel must not even look solid. If a publisher sees the proofs come back from the printer with more than a few inches of unbroken matter in a page he is quite capable of taking the law into his own hands and breaking up the paragraphs himself. Only the few authors labelled as " literary " have been permitted a little latitude in this respect—perhaps because they were found to be incorrigible, or because their sales were so inconsiderable any way that it was not considered worth while to trouble about them.

Some novelists make a fetish of construction ; and they are wise, unless they go too far. I admit cheerfully the mechanical advantages of a preliminary synopsis—the essential scaffolding of your novel-builder. To improvise as you

go on might have served a century or two ago. There is a certain charm about the method. It carries a sense of freedom in its train. The writer consoles himself for any difficulty he may find in arranging the affairs of his characters by the reflection that his story is growing naturally, like a flower, not cramped artificially into a pre-ordained pattern. But there is a tremendous temptation for the writer who adopts this method to wander from the point, especially when his story has reached one of those knotty stages where he cannot see his way clearly ahead for the moment. Then comes that fatal tendency to write round the subject instead of grappling with his difficulties firmly, whereby many a promising reader has been alienated for ever. It does not take much to ruin a budding friendship in the world of books.

The layman may not think it, but it requires a good deal of ingenuity to construct a plausible story that shall also be interesting to the general public. Perhaps some of us are too fearful of leaving loopholes for the critic : we will not be satisfied until we have submitted our trial scene to the legal expert, our voyage across the China seas to the master mariner. The ordinary reader might never notice the error, but we have an artistic conscience : we want our stuff to be as free from all blemish as we can make it. I confess that I like to be quite sure that everything fits in when I am writing a novel ; that the moon is rising at the proper time, and birds are not wearing their mating plumage (if indeed they possess any) at the wrong season. I should never hesitate to worry my astronomical friends, my students of natural history,

in order to set my mind at rest on points like these. True, some of our best-known novelists have not always displayed this fearful care. The ladies, in particular, have had their lapses, especially when treating of sport. But I do not suppose that a slight inaccuracy on occasion seriously damages their sales.

I suppose it is in the drawing of character, above everything, that we find the cardinal distinction between the real novelist and the purveyor of machine-made fiction. It is the great function of the novelist, as I conceive him, to introduce the reader to new circles of friends; and to that end it is clearly essential, first of all, that his characters should be alive. If he has a good story to tell in addition, so much the better: if he has a thesis to prove, we can perhaps bear with it; but unless his men and women are alive he stands on a lower plane: he is no novelist, however many editions he may sell of his stories. He should have another name. I have no quarrel with the man, but he stands in a different category, engaged in a different pursuit. Possibly, looking at the matter from a commercial standpoint, he might say that he cannot afford the time to give his characters a decent semblance of life. He has perhaps to turn out two or three books in the year, which means that he must perforce tear himself away from one set of puppets before he has even pictured them clearly to himself. I think no man should be allowed to write more than a single novel in the twelve months. If we could pass a law to this effect, the standard of modern fiction would rise at once, and we should be freed from a mass of hasty, slovenly, spoiled work that now cumpers our bookstalls

and libraries. An author ought to dwell with his characters, to give them house-room in his mind until he has learned thoroughly to know and love, to hate or to pity them. Then, and not till then, has he some real chance of portraying them with truth and a tender humanity. And when he has finished the book, he should feel a pang of regret, as though parting from real friends. For a year or more they have been his alone, screened carefully from the public view, introduced possibly to one or two intimates in secret. And now the presentation is performed : they are thrust out into a cold and incurious world, where they may, or may not, find a few kindred spirits who will hail their advent with a momentary pleasure ; and perhaps one or two who may take them to their hearts and give them a permanent home.

XIX

JOSEPH CONRAD

It is not a little surprising that one of the brightest stars in the galaxy of British novelists in the early days of the present century should have been by birth a foreigner. The fact is suggestive : it shows, among other things, that our school of fiction wanted something that the British character of that epoch was ill qualified to supply. A bracing tonic, perhaps, or an infusion of new blood. The majority of our successful novelists then were too much concerned with sentiment. The "big sellers," almost to a man (or woman), wallowed in it. They were sugary : their characters resembled the ornaments on a wedding cake. Assuredly they did not err from any excess of subtlety. Upon a slightly surfeited race of readers the Conrad method came with a welcome touch of freshness. We were becoming a little tired of confectionery.

Joseph Conrad was always a psychological analyst. He liked dissecting and discovering the hidden springs of action. As an operator he remained aloof, sure of himself, perhaps even a trifle cold-blooded. His appeal was to the intellect rather than to the passions. And this was what we wanted : some of us were getting more than enough of luxurious weeping over imaginary love affairs. Austerity was an agreeable change, and about Conrad there clung

an air of gravity and restraint. His language, too, was the careful English of the foreigner, in which there is often an old-fashioned charm; and he introduced us to a new world—strange persons in out-of-the-way places rarely visited but by adventurous seamen. Persons who were yet astonishingly real—who thought.

The acute psychologist is not often to be found in the ranks of the best sellers, though it is possible, of course, that his turn may be coming. His work is apt to have a greater interest for members of his own craft than for the general public, which means that he commonly gets a larger share of praise from the reviewers than of solid cash from his publisher. Conrad's early books did not bring him much money. They laid a good foundation, however, and towards the end of his life I suppose Conrad was doing as well as any author of real importance can expect. For, like his predecessor, George Meredith, Conrad had his thorns, his little difficulties. His books are not of the kind that the traveller buys eagerly for an hour's light amusement in a railway carriage. Most of them give food for thought. They insist on being read carefully: like all good work they improve on a closer acquaintance. At first sight the hasty critic may be troubled by one or two insignificant points in his writing. To the end, like some Scotsmen, Conrad was unable to distinguish between his "wills" and his "shalls." Yet for the most part his grammar was sufficiently sound — certainly better than that of most native practitioners.

He brought a fresh eye to bear upon the old problems, both of speech and situation. Being a cosmopolitan, he had of necessity a wider

acquaintance with men and cities, with seas and forests, than falls to the lot of the ordinary Briton. He saw things differently : he dealt with familiar situations after a new fashion. It would be an interesting question to discuss the debt that our language owes to those writers (the late Maarten Maartens was another example) who freshen it from time to time with an infusion of foreign genius, breaking up and recasting phrases that had "set" and were in danger of becoming fossilised. Unconsciously they often reveal unsuspected meanings and beauties in the old locutions that native writers had tacitly agreed to abandon as unfit for further use.

I possess on my shelves a volume of personal reminiscences which Conrad brought out in 1912, from which the curious may learn that he was born in Poland in 1856, and that his real name was Korzeniowski ; also that he did not learn English until he was twenty. But what particularly interested me was the confession that he did not consider his maritime experiences a good equipment for a literary life. One is apt to think that all experience is useful to the novelist, and perhaps life in the old merchant service, before steam or oil had completely driven out sailing vessels, more useful than most. But Conrad's complaint with the sailor's career was based on the singular ground that it failed to prepare a man sufficiently for "the reception of literary criticism."

The remark throws an interesting light upon his relations with the reviewer. Writing was a business with him, and a labour : the reviewer troubled him, and especially the critic who had not been at the pains to read his work with the attention it deserved. For Conrad's had never

been a facile pen. He wrestled with his creations, finding a material parallel for his work in the "everlasting sombre stress of the westward winter passage round Cape Horn." I suppose there are many others who have something of the same feeling, among those who make some real attempt to breathe the spirit of life into their imaginary characters, not content to leave them merely puppets labelled with a quality. The recollection of the months of thought he had put into a book made Conrad disinclined to listen with any semblance of patience to the glib critic who dismissed in a few airy phrases what he had skimmed through in half an hour.

For he was one of those novelists who live with their characters—which, to my mind, is what every novelist ought to do. They used to come (in the days of *Almayer's Folly*) and talk to him at unoccupied moments through the day or night; and down went the recollections on paper, at first with no particular idea of any later appearance in print. Conrad was never a communicative man. He had the look of a solitary, with sombre, introspective eyes, and the small change of conversation did not exist for him. Not merely because he spoke English to the last with some difficulty, but because he had a horror of insincerity. If he had nothing to say, he preferred to say nothing—which seems an obvious course enough to the reasoner, but happens to be adopted by singularly few of our fellows. I daresay he thought that this practice of arousing emotion in others was fraught with a certain danger to the artist. The writer was apt to become the victim of his own exaggeration. "From laughter and tears

the descent is easy to snivelling and giggles"—and he wisely resolved not to permit himself the first step on that dangerous slope. The apophthegm is one I should like to see conspicuously displayed on the wall of every novelist's working room, a warning to the too facile sentimentalist.

It was in the laborious tracing of motive that Conrad seemed to delight most. He loved to get his characters examining their own hearts, arguing out a question of conscience or of conduct by themselves. Treating this sort of subject, he seemed to open a secret door into their very souls. I know no writer who can depict so admirably a mental struggle. He employed generally a cold restraint, an icy, grim persistence. I think this method shows up most strongly in *Under Western Eyes*, when that unfortunate young man, Razumov, is laid upon the table and dissected for our edification. But there is much of the same sort of thing in *Chance*, in *Victory*, in *The Arrow of Gold*, and the rest. Perhaps towards the end of his career Conrad began to analyse too much. Some of his characters became not so much human beings as theatres of civil war. But then, with every year, human nature grows more complex, its problems more puzzling. I should have liked to have a novel from him on the Russia of to-day, a companion to that picture of Russia under the Romanoffs. For Poland, after all, is Russia's neighbour: if anyone could solve the enigma of that vast country it might be a native of Ukraine. Truly a marvellous race, these Poles! From a piano-player they manufacture a statesman: out of a master-mariner they produced perhaps the finest novelist of his day—writing in a foreign tongue.

XX

IN A VICTORIAN LIBRARY

CAN we call it a Victorian library, or was it not even earlier? These libraries that belong to families with no great taste for reading, libraries that have come down from father to son, with just a few additions here and there—a few school and college prizes, perhaps, or a stray book once actually bought because it had struck the fancy of the purchaser—libraries of this sort must clearly be some generations behind their age. Perhaps it was this study of my father's, with its rows of shelves fitted either side of the fire-place and the wall on the opposite side completely lined with books, that inclined me to become a lover of the past rather than the present. I have felt, sometimes, as though I were hopelessly out of date in this twentieth century. I should have been a contemporary of some of these heroes of the eighteenth century or the dawn of the nineteenth. I should have written heroic couplets in the days of Erasmus Darwin and of Miss Seward, the "Swan of Lichfield." However, the Fates had placed my birth a century or so too late; and there was no more to be said.

"Show me a man's library," said some sage, "and I will tell you his character." And this might, I doubt not, be true enough if the library were of his own formation. But the

zealous enquirer would have had little enough to go on, looking through that solid array of books in my father's study. Out of all those books (and there were more than a thousand gathered together in that cosy room of his) there may have been perhaps thirty or forty that he had bought himself—if so many. He was no book-lover, at all events in his later years. Sometimes in the evening, when there was nothing else to be done, and he had exhausted the contents of *The Times* or the weekly paper (a Church paper) that we used to take in, I have seen him take up the latest book from the circulating library that my mother had ordered in. If it chanced to be a biography he might look through a few pages without audible comment: if a novel or a volume of light reminiscence he would put it down after a few minutes with the remark that he could not imagine who wanted to read such rubbish. Yet, you must understand, we selected for our weekly list only the best of an epoch that can hardly be called unduly flippant. It is true I remember one or two volumes by George Augustus Sala, an occasional novel by Rhoda Broughton or Helen Mathers. “Ouida,” of course, would not be seen in a clergyman's drawing-room. Whyte Melville might appear, now and then, for we lived in the middle of a hunting country.

I have been trying to recall recently the contents of that library of ours. Some few of the books I possess still, though the majority were dispersed when my father died and a new incumbent occupied the old rectory. I could not allow the old college prizes to go; so you may still find on my own shelves the works of

that learned and judicious divine, Mr. Richard Hooker, with an account of his life and death by Isaac Walton. Horne's *Introduction to the Scriptures* stand there also, in five fair volumes, stamped with the college arms on the back, and Milner's *Church History* in another four. I remember, too, a whole platoon of dark volumes, copies of *The Expositor* bound in sober black, and another row of *Public and General Acts*, as became the study of an energetic magistrate and Deputy Chairman of Quarter Sessions.

These, I suppose, come almost under the heading of Lamb's *biblia abiblia*—books that are no books, but merely dummies handsomely bound. There were other rows, too, that rather repelled the youthful enquirer at first sight—those long rows of solid-looking volumes bound in calf and lettered on the back as “Works.” There they stood, the “trade editions” as they call them; works of Addison, of Johnson and Hume, of other gentlemen less well known, essayists of importance in their day. And classics, of course, in abundance, bound as though for all time. Murphy's *Tacitus*, Plutarch's *Lives*, Creech's edition of *Lucretius*, Heyne's *Iliad*, Middleton's *Life of Cicero*, Donaldson's *Greek Theatre*. There also, stretching interminably along the bottom shelf on the side opposite the fire-place, ran an ancient cyclopædia—fine confused feeding for the growing mind. But these came later. I am thinking more of the few works that started me off on my career as a catholic reader.

They were few in number. My father, as I have regretfully hinted, could never have been a great supporter of the writers of his day. He bought occasionally, I suppose, a book of

sermons to add to the sombre volumes already occupying the shelf above the cyclopædia. But he did not seem to have taken much interest in the great Victorian novelists, nor in the poets. Somewhere there was to be found a Shakespeare; somewhere a small volume containing Milton's *Paradise Lost*. I remember (but this was in the drawing-room) a morocco bound copy of *Italy* by Samuel Rogers—that book which, being a banker, he determined to make a success, and did so by commissioning Turner, Samuel Prout and Stothard to supply illustrations. Next to it, I think, there might have been found a volume of Tennyson's early poems. I recollect no other poems, except Falconer's *Shipwreck* and Pollok's *Course of Time*, and, hidden away in a corner, those *Prison Thoughts* of the unfortunate Dr. Dodd, about which I have already written. And for the novelists, an edition of Scott in three mammoth volumes, exceedingly heavy to hold. Dickens was not represented at all. Thackeray contributed a single volume—*The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century*. One might have expected to find George Eliot's *Scenes of Clerical Life*, but nothing of hers was discoverable on those shelves. The nearest approach to it, perhaps, was to be found in two volumes by the Rev. F. E. Paget, an author of considerable popularity among the clergymen of that day.

I believe those two volumes of Paget may lay claim to be the first works of fiction of any length that I read. Does anyone, I wonder, read them now? I have a kindly recollection of those two modest books. *The Owllet of Owlstone Edge* was one: the other contained

two contrasted stories, if I remember right, called *The Curate of Cumberworth* and *The Vicar of Roost*. The curate suffered from misplaced zeal, which involved him from the start in a succession of minor disasters: the vicar, on the other hand, as might be guessed from the name of his parish, was essentially a lazy fellow, and a hunter for preferment into the bargain. It is hardly necessary to say that he came to a bad end, whereas the too energetic curate became in due course a credit to his cloth. But they were good little stories, and I remember them with gratitude to this day. Charles Kingsley, in one of his books, puts in a good word for *The Oxlet* and its clerical author.

I take it these two books, and perhaps the mammoth Scott, were the only works of fiction ever purchased by my father. But there were to be found one or two others that, I imagine, had come into his possession more or less by accident. *Mr. Sponge's Sporting Tour* must have been left there by one of my uncles: two volumes by Catherine Sinclair, *Modern Accomplishments* and *Modern Flirtations*, had been presented to my mother. I read those admirable works until I knew them almost by heart. I have not seen the last two for some fifty years. I feel sometimes that I should like to refresh my memory of Miss Sinclair. *A Month in Harrowgate*—was it the fashion to spell it thus in her day?—served as the secondary title of *Modern Flirtations*. Secondary titles were almost obligatory among novelists then.

I cannot tell what chance led to the buying of *The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*, by Oliver Wendell Holmes, but it was a happy day for

me when I discovered it. This was a new sort of writing, eminently natural and unaffected, going where it pleased and mingling prose with verse in a novel and altogether charming style. In all probability I owe it to the worthy doctor that I determined early in life to embrace a literary career. This was easy, I thought in my ignorance. Some day I might surely be able to do something of the same sort myself. *The Professor* and *The Poet* were not included in my father's selection : I bought those for myself, as soon as I began to buy books at all. And perhaps I owe to those three books that tendency to ramble in writing that so many of my brother reviewers have noticed, with obloquy or amused indulgence, according to the state of their livers. It has always been a difficult matter for me to choose a subject and stick to it faithfully for more than a few pages. For this reason, they tell me, I am not a good constructor of novels. I am apt to break away from the straight high road and wander in the flowery fields by the wayside, pursuing stray butterflies.

The fact was, I came to consider that series of Wendell Holmes as a bright exemplar on which I should model my own work. A thin thread of story running through each book—just enough to hold the thing together—and, for the rest, licence to roam wherever one pleased and say anything one wished to say on any conceivable subject. Not a good model, you will say ; and I dare say you will be right ; but nevertheless I cannot help looking back to the author of the Breakfast Table trilogy as first and chief among my literary godfathers.

I do not know that it is a bad thing to start

a career of reading in a library of this sort, where the books that are in any way possible to read (to the eye of youth) are scattered sparingly. There was no question of satiety in my father's study. And the consequence was that the two volumes of Macaulay's *Essays*, for example, which were to be found on one of the top shelves, received an amount of attention that would probably have been frittered away on less worthy material if there had been a wider choice. And I maintain that Macaulay's essays, though it is the fashion to decry them just now, are useful reading for a young mind. They incite the reader to explore: they inspire an ambition. He feels that it is shameful to be ignorant of facts that are, apparently, known to every fourth-form schoolboy. He may not altogether believe in that schoolboy, but it would be pleasant to share his omniscience.

Macaulay, too, was easy reading, compared with most of the books I found there. Now I come to pass those books in review it seems to me that there were singularly few in which a young reader could take any great pleasure. I do not know whether many country clergymen in the seventies had libraries so barren of good reading. There was not even a Boswell's *Johnson*, a Lockhart's *Life of Scott*. We had no edition of Goldsmith, none of Sterne. But we had Knight's *Half-hours with the Best Authors*. And we had, too, a long row of little volumes called, I believe, *Penny Readings*, which contained excerpts from various authors of importance in their day. There are some who despise anthologies; but they are excellent things to have if you can get nothing better. In fact, I am inclined to think that

young readers should be fed largely on selections. They can tell from these specimens what they are likely to enjoy, which authors it may be worth while pursuing. That really excellent selection of English verse, Mr. H. A. Holden's *Foliorum Silvula*, out of which we were given so many passages to render into Latin elegiac or hexameter verse at school, was the first book to inspire me with any liking for poetry. I used to be carried on from stanza to stanza, from author to author, reading that too entrancing volume, until I would awake with a start to find that the hour and a half had passed away, and that I had not even made a beginning with my Latin rendition for the morrow.

But *Foliorum Silvula* did not come into my possession until I went to Winchester. Perhaps it was as well: had I been able to pick it up and browse in its pages earlier I might have become too firmly entangled in the mazes of metrical writing. For almost everything depends upon our environment in early youth. And I suspect that a real love of letters, with perhaps some slight bias towards the sententious must have entered into me from those solemn and sober rows of works, bound in calf, which stretched from wall to wall in my father's study.

